

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE STUDENT

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COSTLY SACRIFICES



► International Sunday School Lessons

Costly Sacrifices

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A Kingdom of Priests, A Holy Nation

Devotional Reading: Leviticus 19:1-10

Background Scripture: Exodus 19

Today's Scripture: Exodus 19:1-14

I. Coming to Sinai

Exodus 19:1-2

1 In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.

2 For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

1. The first two verses of Exodus 19 bookend the narrative that began at Exodus 7:16: Moses had been sent to bring the Hebrew people out of Egypt “that they might serve [God] in the wilderness.” The verse before us gives an indication of how long they had been traveling: this is *the third month* since leaving *Egypt* (compare Exodus 12:2; 13:4). The Hebrew word translated “month” can also mean “new moon.” A new moon is how ancient people would mark this passage of time. The *wilderness of Sinai* was adjacent to the wilderness of Sin, where the people had been traveling (Exodus 16:1; 17:1). They had been without natural access to water or food, and they remained dependent upon God’s provision of each.

2. *Rephidim* is where Moses struck a rock to produce water for the children of Israel, who doubted God’s provision

(Exodus 17:1-7). It is also where the Israelites fought the Amalekites, a group who came out to wage war on God’s people in their vulnerable state. In response, God provided supernatural protection by allowing Moses to raise his hands to assure victory.

Now at their interim destination, the people camped before Mount *Sinai*, also called Mount Horeb (Exodus 3:1). It is where Moses saw the burning bush and removed his sandals before holy ground.

II. God’s Chosen People

Exodus 19:3-6

3 And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.

5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

3. In the ancient Near Eastern world, high elevations were considered holy sites. These were places closer to heaven and the gods who were thought to live there. The “high places” in the land of Israel were even used to worship God before the construction of a temple (1 Kings 3:2). Some five centuries later, Solomon’s temple was constructed at a high elevation and as the proper place of worship.

4. This is the first message carried by Moses—a direct speech of God. The exchange is analogous to “declarations” in a traditional wedding ceremony, which are spoken before a bride and groom take their vows. God is declaring what He has done by choosing the descendants of Jacob and rescuing them from slavery. The words supply a rationale for making an agreement with the Lord: He is the God who delivers.

5. The speech continues with a conditional statement, a way of explaining the logic of *covenant*. God is the initiator of a covenant, just as He made a covenant with Abraham. Covenant is part of His plan to bring blessing to the world. Typically, covenants were agreements between two parties (usually humans or nations). The promise is that, *if* the people hold up the requirements of the covenant, *then [they] shall be a peculiar treasure . . . above all people*. Israel’s obedience would set them apart from all the world.

6. The *holy* status that the Israelites received was not intended just for their personal benefit but ultimately for the benefit of the world as *a kingdom of priests*. This rationale is also discussed in the first century when Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). Likewise, the apostle Paul acknowledges the privileged position of Jewish people: “Unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). Moses had been modeling a mediating role for God’s

people as he accurately reported *the words* spoken by God all along.

III. God Shall Come Exodus 19:7-14

7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.

8 And all the people answered together, and said, all that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.

9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes,

11 And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

12 And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death:

13 There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.

14 And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.

7. Moses was a faithful servant because

he relayed all that God had told him. *Before their faces* may seem like an odd way to give *words*. But the expression is perhaps used in the general sense to mean “in front of them.” The text does not say whether Moses used a form of writing at this point. But in Exodus 20:1-17, Moses will relay ten “words,” also called the Ten Commandments. The verse before us anticipates what Moses shall do by bringing down commands of God, commands that corporate Israel were expected to obey.

8. *Words* of this verse—the collective agreement of *all the people*—are repeated in Exodus 24:3, 7. But here in Exodus 19, how can they agree to stipulations they have yet to hear? One possibility is that the people agreed to and accepted God’s offer of covenant even before they were told its requirements. Exodus 19–20 gives a clearer description of the covenant. Under that reading, the people’s response did not conclude or seal the agreement. Instead, it shows Israel’s eagerness to follow whatever God would have them do. The fact that Moses *returned the words of the people unto the Lord* means that he ascended the mountain to speak with God again.

9. Once Moses had returned to speak with God, he was informed about a pending divine appearance. The name for this is *theophany*, which means an appearance or visible manifestation of God. Earlier in Exodus, God had used a cloud to reveal His presence and to give a sign of His protection (Exodus 13:21). Here, the function of God’s appearance in *a thick cloud* shows Moses’ authority as God’s messenger. Now and into the future (*for ever*), God wants the people to *believe* Moses.

10-11. This verse begins direct speech from God that Moses was to convey to the Israelites. They must be correctly prepared to receive God’s presence. The command to *let them wash their clothes* forms an *inclusio* with Exodus 19:14. Two days will

be the length of this preparation, and the command to *sanctify* is of the same root as “holy” in 19:6. The verb means “to transform someone into the state of holiness” or “to dedicate.” Moses will direct the people to avoid ceremonially unclean things, while at the same time they will wash and prepare themselves in body and spirit.

12. Moses was already on the mountain when he heard this, so the prohibition didn’t apply to him. A constructed perimeter would reinforce that Moses—no one else—was to be the one to whom all the people must listen.

God’s holiness was not something to haphazardly approach. Merely touching the area’s *border* would bring death. This penalty is less as a punishment than a means to protect the community from a defiler’s misdeed.

13. Here, the warning is heightened: even a single *hand*—perhaps laid upon the mountain in curiosity—or the mindless trampling of an animal would be enough to warrant death through stoning or arrows. Both forms of execution would allow others to remain at a distance from the one who had violated God’s space. The people were not to permit anything defiling to remain in their midst as they prepared to meet God.

14. The text does not say how *Moses sanctified the people*. But washing of *clothes* is a form of ceremonial cleansing and is specified dozens of times in Leviticus and Numbers. Usually, it is prescribed when an individual or priest is being cleansed from something unclean. Two days would probably not be required to complete the washing. But a time of spiritual preparation is also appropriate when entering God’s presence. The Israelites were being treated as the “nation of priests” that God had named them in Exodus 19:6, since proper clothing and preparation would come to be required of priests.

Involvement Learning

A Kingdom of Priests, A Holy Nation

Into the Lesson

What methods does God use to get our attention?

Today, we will look at an incident from ancient Israel's history that featured an attention-getting method of an exceptional nature.

Into the Word

Read today's text. Summarize God's expectations as expressed through Moses.

Explain the concept of "covenant" in its original context.

List questions about the text that come to mind.

For each of the following phrases, answer the questions below:

1. *God's Faithfulness*
2. *The Priesthood of All*
3. *Acceptable Worship*

What does today's Scripture say about this topic?

1.

2.

3.

What does this account suggest for our behavior today?

1.

2.

3.

Key Verse

Therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

—Exodus 19:5b-6a

Into Life

List ways that Christians can be mediators of God's grace today.

List ways to declare God's praises today.

Thought to Remember

The holy God is the redeeming God.

A Space for God

Devotional Reading: John 4:13-26

Background Scripture: Exodus 25—27

Today's Scripture: Exodus 25:1-9; 26:1, 31-37

I. Gift from the Heart

Exodus 25:1-9

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.

3 And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass,

4 And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair,

5 And rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood,

6 Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense,

7 Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate.

8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

1. Since the Israelites arrived at Sinai, *Moses* had been functioning as a mediator: taking messages from God down the mountain and returning responses from the people. The instructions came directly from God, and Moses did not alter the words. He received these words while on

the mountain, hidden from the people's sight for 40 days (Exodus 24:18).

2. The word *willingly* indicates that the *offering* God prescribed was to be voluntary. Worship through giving must be motivated internally rather than externally. This is analogous to the "cheerful" giver praised by the apostle Paul when he collected an offering (2 Corinthians 9:7).

God did not specify that the offering be taken up for the construction of a tabernacle—although that is what it would be used to build—but God said *bring me an offering*. As gifts, these offerings are directed first and foremost to God.

3. This verse describes the first of several kinds of things acceptable for the offering—and perhaps these metals come first because they were most valuable. Additional metals of iron, tin, or lead are not mentioned.

The most valuable of the three was (and still is) *gold*; some form of that word occurs over 100 times in the book of Exodus alone. Gold was used in ways other than as a medium of exchange (money). Most tabernacle furnishings would be either overlaid with gold or made from pure gold. More than four centuries later, King Solomon would add to or replace articles, also using gold (1 Kings 7:48-50); he minimized the use of *silver* (10:21).

4. In antiquity, fabric dyes were not readily available and would need to be carefully sourced. A garment's value was tied to the rarity of its dye, with *blue*, *purple*, and *scarlet* being among the rarest. These shades of violet or blueish-dyed wool would be created from crushed mollusks and certain plants. They would be used in the construction of artistic curtains.

5. Leather *dyed red* would probably be colored from a tanning process. The reference to *badgers' skins* comes from a rare Hebrew word that resembles the Arabic word for "porpoise." Sea creatures inhabit the Red Sea and could have been hunted by the Egyptians for their fine hides. *Shittim wood* is useful for the construction of furniture and structural beams. It is also called "acacia wood." Its wood is extremely dense and is a desirable building material.

6. The two types of *oil* are for different purposes in the function of the planned sanctuary. Oil *for the light* was to be burned in the lampstand. Since the tabernacle was to be without windows, light would come only from lamps. A depiction of the Jewish menorah is found upon the Arch of Titus in Rome, which shows a lampstand carried out of the destroyed second temple. It is possible—though impossible to be certain—that the original lampstand for the tabernacle followed this familiar design.

On the other hand, *anointing* oil would be used for just that purpose—not only on people but also on tabernacle furnishings (Exodus 30:22-33). It was to be made according to a formula in Exodus 30:34.

7. *Onyx* are the only *stones* mentioned by name for *the ephod* and *breastplate*, two items of the high priest's attire. The names of the other precious stones are listed in Exodus 28:17-20. The onyx stones were to be two in number, each engraved with the names of six of the twelve tribes of Israel

(Exodus 28:9-11). Four rows of three precious stones each would be set in the breastplate of the ephod, "with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, . . . like the engravings of a signet" (28:21). The high priest would wear the names of all twelve tribes when he came before God's presence and entered the holy place.

8. This verse indicates the reason for these details: God wants to *dwell* with His people. So, He directed the people to construct a place suitable to that purpose: *a sanctuary*. This refers to the tabernacle (or to the holiest part thereof) and, much later, the temple. The layers of curtains as walls and partitions would clearly separate the sacred space of God from anything profane among the people.

9. *The pattern of the tabernacle* and *the pattern of all the instruments* were prescribed by God alone. Some Bible interpreters think the phrase *that I shew thee* means that a heavenly tabernacle or temple was shown to Moses so that the earthly tabernacle would be built in its likeness. In support of this, Stephen in Acts 7:44 claims the tabernacle to have been made "according to the fashion that [Moses] had seen." Likewise, the writer of Hebrews 8:5 says that Moses made the tabernacle "according to the pattern shewed to" him.

II. Tabernacle Directions

Exodus 26:1, 31-37

1 Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

31 And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made:

32 And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with

gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver.

33 And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.

34 And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.

35 And thou shalt set the table without the vail, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side.

36 And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework.

37 And thou shalt make for the hanging five pillars of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, and their hooks shall be of gold: and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them.

1. After describing the construction of the tabernacle's contents in Exodus 25:10-40, Exodus 26:1 begins with specifications of the tabernacle's construction itself. *Linen* is made from the fibers of the flax plant.

31. The *vail* mentioned here is different from the "curtains" described in Exodus 26:1. While constructed of the same material and decorated the same way, the veil has a unique function: it separated the holy place from the most holy place within the tabernacle.

32. The reason the veil needed to be supported by *four pillars . . . overlaid with gold* was so it could hang and serve as the necessary partition. These golden rods would nest into silver sockets (from the gold and silver that were given in the offering). The poles would be spaced to sup-

port the stretched veil, which appears to be designed as one piece, unlike the curtains. Thus, the veil had no gaps as it sectioned off the area of the presence of God.

33. Here is the explanation for the veil's use: it separated areas within the tabernacle. This division was to shield the area known as *the most holy* (which housed the very glory of God) from the area called *the holy place*. It was to be hung on *taches* (connecting buckles or rings) that were attached to four pillars. Only a single item is designated for the *most holy* place: the *ark of the testimony*, which is another name for "ark of the covenant" (Numbers 10:33; 14:44).

34. The box itself was to be two and a half cubits by one and a half cubits, or the equivalent of about 45 by 27 inches. Its shittim or acacia wood was covered in gold, but the *mercy seat* was a solid gold cover placed on the top. It is called a mercy seat because there, at that location between two golden cherubim, God promised to meet with Moses (Leviticus 16:2).

35. The tabernacle faced east. *The table* with incense and bread was to be placed on the side of the veil that did not face inward toward the most holy place. Likewise, *the candlestick* is designated for the south side. Nothing is said about the significance of the locations. Among other things, the table would hold 12 loaves of bread to symbolize the 12 tribes (Leviticus 24:5-9). This bread was to be eaten by priests since it would be replaced regularly as an offering to God.

36-37. The tabernacle doorway was to have the same coloring as the veil and curtains but would lack the interwoven cherubim decoration. The doorway was supported by five pillars instead of four, like the four holding up the internal veil. The metal used for the sockets was brass, a lesser material than the silver sockets within the tabernacle.

Involvement Learning

A Space for God

Into the Lesson

List things that can be (or have been) brought into your home to enable you to sense God's presence better.

Perhaps no place brings us more comfort than a place where we can feel close to God. In today's Bible study, we will consider the place God designed for his people in antiquity to draw nearer to Him.

Key Verse

Let them make me a sanctuary; that I
may dwell among them.
—Exodus 25:8

Into the Word

Read Exodus 25:1-9; 26:1, 31-37. List what the people gave in each category:

Organic Materials: _____

Inorganic Materials: _____

How "expected were these offerings?

List examples of directives from the lesson text that fall under these descriptions:

God Is Separate from His People

God Wants to Be Close to His People

What does the description of the tabernacle say about God? about the Israelites?

Read Hebrews 9. List contrasts between Old Testament tabernacle worship and New Testament worship through Christ.

Into Life

Complete the following prompts:

*The place where I best sense
God's closeness is . . .*

*The place where I best sense
God's holiness is . . .*

*The practice that brings me
closest to God is . . .*

Write a brief prayer of gratitude to God for His willingness to dwell with us today.

Thought to Remember

God wants to dwell with His people.

The Ordination of Priests

Devotional Reading: Psalm 133

Background Scripture: Exodus 29:1-37; Leviticus 8:1-36

Today's Scripture: Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37

I. Preparing the Offerings

Exodus 29:1-3

1 And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office: take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish,

2 And unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: of wheaten flour shalt thou make them.

3 And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams.

1a. The word translated *hallow* is also translated “sanctify” in Exodus 28:41 and 29:36-37. It is the verb form of the noun regularly translated “holy.” The idea of holiness is pervasive in the Law of Moses and the history of Israel. It has the sense of emulating God in being “set apart” as pure and undefiled. It is the opposite of that which is unclean or profane. Specific rules for priests in this regard were stricter than those for the rank-and-file Israelites. Even so, the requirement for personal holiness isn’t just for priests under the old covenant—it’s for everyone.

1b. The process of ordination for the priests was costly! For all three animals to be *without blemish* meant they were not sick or deformed in any way. This

was not to be used as an opportunity to get rid of inferior livestock. These animals were to be sacrificed according to detailed instructions. As they were sacrificed, they were given separate and distinct designations.

2. Three distinct manner of bread were specified for the ordination. But despite their differences, they all have one thing in common: they are *unleavened* (made without yeast). Up to this point in Bible history, there have been two incidents associated with unleavened bread. The lesser-known incident involved the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:3); the better-known incident was the Passover and its subsequent remembrances (Exodus 12). Both situations involved a need for haste—yeasted bread would have taken too long to rise.

The specification that these breads were to be made with *wheaten flour* is itself revealing. Both barley and wheat were characteristic grain crops in the promised land. But barley was the food of the poor. Thus, we see a certain parallel with the requirement to bring an unblemished animal—the bread to be offered had to be made with the best flour.

3. The exacting nature of the instructions reveals how important and serious this ceremony should be in the eyes of the Israelites. This is not some impromptu

ritual. We can easily imagine the animals were cleaned and groomed, and the bread was made by the finest cooks. The *basket* itself would be of the best craftsmanship, fit for this solemn occasion.

II. Preparing the Ordinands

Exodus 29:4-9

4 And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water.

5 And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod:

6 And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre.

7 Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him.

8 And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them.

9 And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

4. Exodus 40:12 is worded almost identically to the verse before us. The positioning of that verse reinforces the chronological element here: the ordination took place after *the tabernacle* had been set up.

The tabernacle proper was a portable tentlike structure. It was situated inside a courtyard, to the courtyard's west side. Once the tabernacle was operational, its most holy place was to be entered by the high priest only, and only on the Day of Atonement. But with the tabernacle's completion, there was no priesthood in

general or high priest in particular to use it! Thus, the need for ordaining *Aaron and his sons*.

The door of the tabernacle faced east: where Moses was to bring the ordinands. There, the men were to be washed with water, a ceremonial cleansing to begin the ordination ceremony.

The sons of Aaron were four in number; their names were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar (Numbers 26:60). The first two lost their lives when they offered "strange fire before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:1-2). That happened after the ordination ceremony, so all four were present to become priests.

5. There were several parts to this unique uniform. The first is here called a *coat*, but it has a longer designation of "broidered coat" in Exodus 28:4. This close-fitting shirt-like garment was made of fine linen. It is not to be confused with the linen undergarment of Exodus 28:42; 39:28.

The robe of the ephod is an outer garment. Particulars regarding its features and functions are found in Exodus 28:31-35; 39:22. Creation of the ephod itself is addressed in 28:6-14; 39:2-7. It may have been something like an apron.

What is called *the breastplate* here is further designated "the breastplate of judgment" three times in Exodus 28:15-30; this item's construction of gold, precious stones, and fine linen is covered extensively there and in 39:8-21. Not mentioned in the lesson text for today are "the Urim and the Thummim" that fit into the breastplate (28:30). We don't know exactly what these were, but their function seemed to be a means of consulting God regarding important decisions (example: Numbers 27:18-21).

Similar to that of the ephod was the material of the *curious girdle*. This item was to interconnect with the breastplate

and ephod in a manner that would prevent unintended movement of the breastplate.

6. As clothing items for the torso were to be interconnected, so too were items for the high priest's *head*. The *mitre* was the headdress, and *the holy crown* was something attached to it.

We don't really know what the mitre looked like beyond the brief descriptions in Exodus 28:4, 37; 39:30. It may be something like what is called a "turban" today; it is unlikely to have been like the tall and pointed headpieces we see in modern religious ceremonies. On the other hand, Exodus 28:36-38 is most helpful in providing information about the holy crown in terms of (1) its nature of solid gold, (2) its engraved message of holiness, (3) its function of the high priest's bearing of guilt, and (4) its attachment to the front of the headdress.

7. *The anointing oil* was a mixture of olive oil and four fine spices (Exodus 30:22-25). This use of this formulation was highly restricted, what one might call "divinely proprietary" (30:26-33).

8-9a. Aaron's *sons* were the nephews of Moses, who was still receiving the *thou shalt* instructions regarding their ordination to be priests. After they had been ceremonially washed, they would be ready to receive the garments prepared for them.

Comparing the sons' *coats*, *girdles*, and *bonnets* with the clothing of their father is insightful. The results of such a comparison classifies the garments in terms of (1) those common to both father and sons, (2) those unique to the father, and (3) those unique to the sons.

9b. The words in the original language translated *perpetual statute* occur about two dozen times in the Old Testament. In addition to describing the enduring nature of the priestly *office* (compare Exodus 40:15), it also describes priestly tasks (examples: 27:21; Leviticus 24:3).

III. Requiring a Week

Exodus 29:35-37

35 And thus shalt thou do unto Aaron, and to his sons, according to all things which I have commanded thee: seven days shalt thou consecrate them.

36 And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it.

37 Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

35. This verse summarizes the intricacies of the ordination process for *Aaron* and *his sons* as set forth in Exodus 29:10-34 and Leviticus 8. Some students propose that its requirement to last *seven days* was an intended parallel to the seven days of creation, ending on the Sabbath.

36. The tabernacle was equipped with two altars: one of about 56 square feet in area for animal sacrifices and another, smaller altar of less than 3 square feet in area for burning incense. *The altar* in view here is the sacrificial altar. This altar was the place where the priests did most of their work.

A sin offering was a means of *atonement*; Leviticus 4 explains this in detail. The need to *cleanse the altar . . . to sanctify it* is addressed in Leviticus 16.

37. The fact that *whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy* is quite remarkable given that it is the opposite of the normal laws of defilement. When "clean" and "unclean" come into contact with one another, the regular pattern is that the clean becomes unclean. Jesus took as given that the altar sanctifies the sacrificial gift on it (Matthew 23:19).

Involvement Learning

The Ordination of Priests

Into the Lesson

Using your phone, look up an example of an oath of office or an oath of allegiance. Cycle through these five questions to help understand the meaning and significance of the oath.

Who? _____
What? _____
When? _____
Where? _____
Why? _____

Today, we will look at the ancient ordination or consecration of Old Testament priests and how that is a foundation for important New Testament concepts.

Key Verse

The priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute; and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

—Exodus 29:9b

Into the Word

Read Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37. How does Exodus 29 relate to Leviticus 8?

What is the overall significance of the garments?

Why a seven-day process rather than one hour?

Why so many intricate details?

What were the various ways the loaves were to be distinguished from one another?

What priestly garments did Aaron wear that his sons did not?

What priestly garments did the sons wear that Aaron did not?

What priestly garments did Aaron and his sons have in common?

Into Life

Which is the best New Testament parallel to Exodus 29: Mark 3:14; Luke 10:1; Acts 6:2-6; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:22; 1 Peter 2:5, 9?

Make a plan to serve as a member of the Christian's holy and royal priesthood per 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

Thought to Remember

Honor your part in the priesthood of all believers.

Offering a Sweet Aroma to God

Devotional Reading: Romans 12:1-8

Background Scripture: Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13

Today's Scripture: Leviticus 1:3-17

I. An Offering from the Herd Leviticus 1:3-9

3 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.

4 And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

5 And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

6 And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces.

7 And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire:

8 And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar:

9 But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

3a. In the verse just before this one,

the Lord permitted that animal sacrifices could come from either a person's herd (of cattle) or flock (of sheep and goats). The verse before us narrows the focus specifically to that of a *burnt offering* that comes from *the herd*.

The directive to sacrifice only animals *without blemish* is repeated in Deuteronomy 15:21. This command reflects a key distinction between profane and sacred things. It also emphasizes that God deserves the best of one's herds rather than the worst.

3b. The Hebrew word translated *of his own voluntary will* occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament, seven of those in the book of Leviticus. It may refer to something that is acceptable or pleasing from the point of view of the giver or from the point of view of the receiver. In the context of Leviticus's focus on proper sacrifices, the word refers to what is acceptable to God, what conforms to His requirements, and what pleases Him.

4. As the reader works through the procedure specified for the various types of sacrifices, several similarities are seen. The first is the instruction to put a *hand upon the head* of the *offering*. This is the first of a multistep procedure. The placement of the hand symbolizes the person's submission of the animal as a sacrifice on the person's behalf.

5. As the procedure continues to the following steps, we may wonder who did the hands-on work to *kill the bullock*. The context implies that it was the one who had brought the animal to be sacrificed; after that, *the priests, Aaron's sons*, took over to perform the rest of the tasks regarding *blood*. But Leviticus 14:19-20 mentions a priest who was to slaughter the animal. In any case, a priest had to be present to officiate.

6. The next step was the removal (*shall flay*) of the animal's hide. This might be either prior to or simultaneous with cutting the carcass *into his pieces*. Both would speed up the burning process. Leviticus 7:8 directed that the priest officiating at the burnt offering should receive the animal's hide.

7. Only priests were allowed to carry out the act of sacrificing the animal prepared for the burnt offering. The phrase *put fire upon the altar* does not mean "to start the fire," because the fire for this *altar* was to burn continuously. The idea, instead, is to stoke the fire.

8. Exodus 29:13 and Leviticus 8:20; 9:13 specify *the parts* in greater detail.

9. This verse concludes the description of the ritual that began in Leviticus 1:4, above. The resulting smoke that creates a *sweet savour unto the Lord* attributes a human characteristic—a sense of smell—to God. This is anthropomorphic language. Even though God is a Spirit, the Scriptures speak of Him as having physical characteristics. Here, the sense of smell depicts how the Lord was pleased with the burnt offering as presented in the manner set forth in the text.

To summarize, the ritual involved these steps:

1. Place hand on the animal's head
2. Slay the animal
3. Splash animal blood against the sides of the altar

4. Remove the hide from the carcass
5. Dismember the carcass
6. Stoke the altar fire
7. Arrange wood on the altar
8. Arrange body pieces and fat on the altar fire
9. Wash internal organs and legs
10. Burn all except hide to create smoke pleasing to the Lord

II. An Offering from the Flock Leviticus 1:10-13

10 And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish.

11 And he shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle his blood round about upon the altar.

12 And he shall cut it into his pieces, with his head and his fat: and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar:

13 But he shall wash the inwards and the legs with water: and the priest shall bring it all, and burn it upon the altar: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.

10. For this kind of offering, *goats* or *sheep* that were *male without blemish* were interchangeable with bullocks, just discussed. We see male goats and sheep themselves as interchangeable for Passover in Exodus 12:5. Either goats or sheep were acceptable for peace offerings, with either male or female allowed. Either bullocks, male or female goats, or female lambs are allowed for sin or trespass offerings, depending on the nature of the sin.

11. Here a specific instruction was given as to where the animal was to be slain: *on the side of the altar northward*. Why this was required is not entirely clear, although it may have something to do with the fact

that the tabernacle and the gateway into its courtyard faced east. This rationale may also combine in some way with a need to distinguish this offering from the one taken from the herd; other than that, the procedure at this point is the same.

12. Again, the procedure is the same as that designated for the bovines.

13. Yet again, the procedure is the same as with the bullock (Leviticus 1:9).

III. An Offering of Birds

Leviticus 1:14-17

14 And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtle-doves, or of young pigeons.

15 And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off his head, and burn it on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar:

16 And he shall pluck away his crop with his feathers, and cast it beside the altar on the east part, by the place of the ashes:

17 And he shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

14. This option for a *burnt* offering was provided for people who could not afford to bring the aforementioned offerings from a herd or flock. Such an option was also provided for women after childbirth who could not afford to offer a lamb for the burnt offering of purification. One may recall the sacrifice that Joseph and Mary offered following the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:24).

15. The procedure for offering a bird as a burnt offering differed from that pre-

scribed for offerings from the herd or the flock. Whereas the blood of the animals that were sacrificed was sprinkled around the altar of burnt offering, the bird's blood was to be *wrung out at the side of the altar*. Though the bird's blood would not be nearly as abundant as that of the other animals, the need to separate its blood from its body must be completed. Israelites were forbidden to eat blood.

16. The meaning of a bird's *crop* is uncertain. It may refer to the pouch near the gullet or throat (the craw) where the bird stores food temporarily before digestion. Another option is that it may refer to the lower intestines. Its removal may be compared to removing the intestines from the animals of the herd or the flock.

The place of ashes that was *beside the altar* seems to have been a temporary location for ashes; the ultimate destination for that refuse was outside the camp.

17. Further instructions regarding the sacrifices of birds conclude this portion of our text. The anatomy of a bird is quite different from that of sheep/goats and bovines, thus the sacrificial procedure was quite different. *The priest* was solely responsible for preparing and presenting the bird as a burnt offering. Though not as monetarily valuable as something offered from the flock or the herd, this offering still produced a *sweet savour unto the Lord*. Whether the worshipper was well-to-do or impoverished made no difference to the Lord, who treats everyone alike.

As followers of Jesus, our duty is to offer to God, not burnt sacrifices of animals or birds, but our lives as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). Our sacrifices do include the monetary (2 Corinthians 8:3-4; Philippians 4:18) but are primarily spiritual, consisting of "the fruit of our lips" offering our thanks to God (Hebrews 13:15) and the good deeds we do as salt and light in our spheres of influence.

Involvement Learning

Offering a Sweet Aroma to God

Into the Lesson

Why are ceremonies important?

Why are ceremonies not important?

Worship in the tabernacle was bound up in symbolism and ceremony. Let's see how and why.

Key Verse

His inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord. And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish.

—Leviticus 1:9-10

Into the Word

Answer these true/false questions. Check your answers by reading Leviticus 1:3-17.

1. A "burnt offering" is the same as a "sin offering." T/F.
2. In offerings, animals were burned alive. T/F.
3. Eating the blood of the sacrifice was forbidden. T/F.
4. The sacrificial animal had to be unblemished. T/F.
5. Goats could not be burnt offerings. T/F.

Comparing the features of the burnt offering with the following offerings:

The meat offering (Leviticus 2)

The peace offering (Leviticus 3)

The sin offering (4:1–5:13)

The trespass offering (5:14–6:7).

Into Life

1 2 3 4 5
Never *Always*

Rate yourself on the above scale for each one by writing a number next to the letter.

1. I am actively sacrificing myself to God. ____
2. My offerings to the Lord are heartfelt, representing my best. ____
3. I think more about what I can give to God than what I want to get from Him. ____

What experiences have you had with the concept of an accountability partner?

Who will be an accountability partner for you in light of the challenges of today's text?

Thought to Remember

Always worship God on His terms,
not ours.

Sacrifice: Then and Now

by Editorial Staff

The themes of worship, sacrifices, and offerings run through the Scriptures. Grasping the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant is essential to our understanding of the New Testament's presentation of Christ's sacrifice. This quarter will explore sacrifice and worship in the Old Testament and what the New Testament has to say about sacrifice and worship under the new covenant.

Tabernacle and Sacrifices

The first unit of lessons covers parts of Exodus and Leviticus that describe the system of sacrifices and offerings that created a holy people and a place for the presence of the Lord. On Mount Sinai, the Lord decreed to Moses that the Old Testament covenant people are “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Exodus 19:6; see lesson 1). The Lord gave the people specific instructions for constructing a sanctuary known as the tabernacle, which contained “the holy place and the most holy” (26:33; see lesson 2). In the tabernacle (and, later, the temple), burnt offerings were presented to the Lord, following the expectations that He gave to the people (Leviticus 1:3-17; see lesson 4).

Not only did the Lord consecrate specific places, but He also consecrated specific people for a particular service. For example, from among the people, priests were chosen and ordained to officiate at the altar (Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37; see lesson 3).

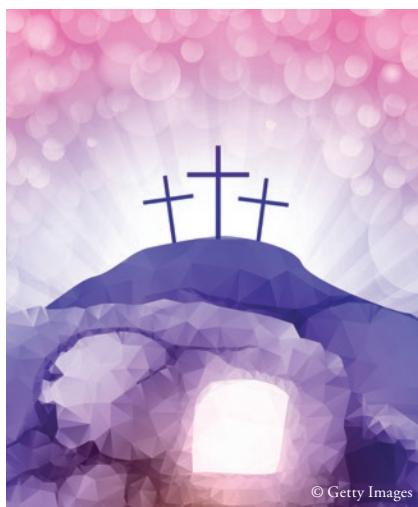
Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

The second unit turns to New Testament texts that explore the significance of

Jesus' perfect sacrifice. The writer of the book of Hebrews contrasts the annual sacrifices of the Law of Moses—a law that is “a shadow of good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1)—with Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice (10:11-14; etc.; see lesson 6). The seventh lesson of the quarter comes from the epistles of John, where the author describes the love of God by His sending of His Son “to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Christ's resurrection on the third day confirms His sacrifice on the cross. Lesson 8 examines the details surrounding Christ's death and resurrection as told by the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54; 28:1-10). Christ is the glorious Lamb who was slain and whose blood has “redeemed us to God” (Revelation 5:9; see lesson 9). Even in the throne room of Heaven, the glorious Lamb is declared “worthy”!

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The Day of Atonement

Devotional Reading: Psalm 40:9-17

Background Scripture: Leviticus 16

Today's Scripture: Leviticus 16:11-19

I. Atonement for Some Leviticus 16:11-14

11 And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:

12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil:

13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

11. This verse begins to list the sacrificial procedures needed to cleanse the most holy place, starting with the cleansing of the high priest, *Aaron* himself. He had to address his uncleanness before taking the next step of atoning for the people's sins. After doing so, Aaron proceeded to offer the required sacrifices that were part of the day's procedures.

The verb translated *make an atonement* is a critical one in the book of Leviticus. In fact, over half of its appearances in the Bible occur in Leviticus. The popular-level description of atonement is that of "at-one-ment" with God. That is certainly what atonement results in, but the verb translated "make an atonement" by itself doesn't reveal to our modern ears how that "at-one-ment" with God is to be achieved.

The challenge involves some technical issues with the nature of the Hebrew language. In the word's various configurations and contexts, it can mean "ransom," "payment of money," "bribe," or "pacify" (Exodus 30:12; Job 31:39; 1 Samuel 12:3; Proverbs 16:14, respectively). These meanings are not mutually exclusive.

The old Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, helps us here. The words it uses are picked up in the New Testament to explain the sacrifice of Christ in terms of the word *propitiation* (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). That meaning also fits with what the Day of Atonement provided: a means of escaping the penalty for one's sin by the offering of a substitutionary sacrifice.

12. Aaron (or any high priest who would take part in these proceedings on the Day of Atonement) had to prepare himself carefully and appropriately

before entering *within the vail*, meaning the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place within the tabernacle. The source of the needed *burning coals of fire* was likely the altar of burnt offering, which was located near the front of the courtyard of the tabernacle. Aaron's loss of two sons when they misused censers of fire made clear the necessity of following these instructions with great care and seriousness.

13. The *cloud* of smoke created by the burning of *incense* is for Aaron's protection, since no one can see God's face and live. The *mercy seat* refers to the elaborate cover of the ark of the covenant, which was topped with two golden angelic figures (cherubim) facing one another with outstretched wings. The ark represented God's presence among the people. The word translated as *testimony* refers to the stone tablets into which Moses chiseled God's law, tablets that were kept inside the ark of the covenant.

The presence of the Lord in this most holy place is what made it "most holy." That was why the high priest could not enter it carelessly or casually. God must be approached on His terms, not ours.

14. This action is similar to what was to be done for other sin offerings. In those cases, the blood was to be applied to the altar of incense, which was located immediately in front of the veil (curtain) that shielded the most holy place. Here, however, the blood was first to be sprinkled on the east side of the ark of the covenant. Since the tabernacle was situated facing east, the *eastward* side is the front side.

II. Atonement for Many

Leviticus 16:15-17

15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood

of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel.

15a Having provided atonement for himself and his family, the high priest was then to prepare to enter the most holy place a second time on behalf of *the people*, his fellow Israelites. That preparation involved killing one of the two goats of *the sin offering*. The first goat was slaughtered as an atoning sacrifice, cleansing the sacred precincts from the impurity of Israel's sins. The other goat became the scapegoat, which was released into the wilderness. The priest would first lay hands on the goat's head and confess the people's sins over it, thus transferring them symbolically to the animal. A person would then be charged with taking the goat into the wilderness and releasing it so that it wouldn't return.

15b. The high priest was to follow the same procedure that he did in providing atonement for himself and his household. Sin offerings on behalf of the people are described in detail in Leviticus 4:13-21.

16a. We may wonder why *the holy place* would need atonement. After all, inanimate objects have no consciousness or ability to sin! As pointed out in the comment on verse 11, atonement addressed not only

individual sins but also the contamination of places and things closely associated with the holy God. Therefore, *atonement* was not only for people but also for consecrated things and areas.

Three words underline the seriousness of the spiritual state of *the children of Israel: uncleanness, transgressions, and sins*. The Hebrew word rendered *transgressions* is the most serious word in Hebrew for disobedience toward God; it implies deliberate and willful rebellion.

16b. When Moses set apart the nation of Israel as God's covenant people, he did so by sprinkling blood on an altar, on the book of the covenant, and on the people. And when *the tabernacle* was completed, it too (and everything within it) was sprinkled with blood. The tabernacle remained *among* the people, even in their state of *uncleanness*, but atonement by means of blood needed to be provided for the tabernacle each year.

17. This verse might be summed up with just three words: Keep your distance! To do so would prevent the high priest's being distracted from his duties. The absolutely vital nature of the high priest's actions for *atonement* is seen in the all-encompassing applications to *himself, his household, and for all the congregation of Israel*. Such a restriction echoes what the Israelites were told when God's presence came to them at Mount Sinai. No one, not even an animal, was allowed to cross the sacred boundaries except for Moses and Aaron; whoever did so would die. On the Day of Atonement, no one could reenter the tabernacle until atonement had been made for priest, places, and people.

III. Atonement for the Altar Leviticus 16:18-19

18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the

blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

19 And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

18. After the purification of the most holy place, the cleansing regimen progresses outward. The tabernacle featured two altars: the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense. We wonder which of the two altars is being referred to here. The statement that the high priest is to *put [blood] upon the horns of the altar round about* doesn't help us decide, since both altars were to be treated that way.

Favoring the subject to be the altar of burnt offering is the fact that it was used for so many offerings to address the sins of the people that the need for its own atonement was much greater than that of the altar of incense. Favoring the altar of incense, however, is the phrase *the altar that is before the Lord*. The altar of incense was located very close to the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place, whereas the altar of burnt offering was located at the entrance to the tabernacle. Given its proximity to God's abode, however, the position of the altar of burnt offering could also merit its description as *before the Lord*. Moreover, the fact that the priest is told to *go out* suggests that he is leaving the tabernacle, in which case the altar of burnt offering would be in view.

19. *Blood* is not the only substance to be sprinkled *seven times* under the Law of Moses. Oil and water were also used ceremonially in this manner (examples: Leviticus 8:10-11; 14:5). Such sprinklings could be done for the physical healing of someone's body. But blood sprinklings were for cleansing the sacred space of the tabernacles and its objects.

Involvement Learning

The Day of Atonement

Into the Lesson

Describe how your family celebrates annual traditions (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) in ways other families may not. Elaborate on the particulars of why and how regarding those traditions.

It is good for us to celebrate the people, things, and events that are important to us. The celebrations of the Old Testament were something of a double-edged sword in this regard: they could simultaneously be times of celebration and solemn reflection. Today's lesson has us consider one such day.

Into the Word

Read Leviticus 16:11-19. For the following elements, detail the physical descriptions and purposes, according to the respective texts.

Vail

(Exodus 26:31-35; Leviticus 16:12-15)

Physical Description: _____

Purpose: _____

Incense

(Exodus 30:34-38; Leviticus 16:12-13)

Physical Description: _____

Purpose: _____

Mercy Seat

(Exodus 25:17-22; Leviticus 16:13-15)

Physical Description: _____

Purpose: _____

Blood

(Leviticus 16:14-19; Hebrews 9:22)

Physical Description: _____

Purpose: _____

Sin Offering

(Leviticus 4:1-12; 16:11-15)

Physical Description: _____

Purpose: _____

Key Verse

He shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

—Leviticus 16:16

Into Life

Agree or disagree with the following statement, and write your argument for your side in the space below.

Our congregation should have an annual day for confessing sin together.

Thought to Remember

Praise God for His provisions of atonement!

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:41-45

Background Scripture: Hebrews 9:23—10:25

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 9:23-28; 10:1-4, 11-14, 19-25

I. Absolute Necessity

Hebrews 9:23-28

23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

23. The word *therefore* indicates that the writer is moving from establishing facts of Christ's blood atonement to exploring the implications of those facts. The phrase *patterns of things in the heavens* refers to things of earth with counterparts in Heaven. The need to use animal blood to purify various elements of the old covenant worship structures seems clear in Leviticus 16:15-19.

24. The word *for* implies that what fol-

lows explains or expands on the previous statement. Mortal high priests enter into a sanctuary made by human hands. Christ, on the other hand, entered *into heaven itself* at His ascension.

25. This verse compares how Jesus' service differs from mortal high priests. The Law of Moses prescribes an annual Day of Atonement for addressing the people's sins. Two goats were chosen, one for sacrifice to atone for sins and one for release into the wilderness as a scapegoat to carry off sins. On the Day of Atonement and only on that day, *the high priest* would enter the Holy of Holies to set these procedures in motion.

26. Hebrews 7:27 makes much the same point that we see here. Both passages emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Rather than suffering *often*, His sacrifice was one-time only. That's one reason it is superior to the sacrifices of mortal high priests. If His sacrifice were only as effective as that of animals, He would have had to die repeatedly *since the foundation of the world*.

27-28. The death sentence that all humans labor under was pronounced in Genesis 3:19. The writer's phrase *once to die* refers to physical death. There are some notable exceptions in that a handful of people in the Bible died twice physically: those whom Christ raised from the dead

during His earthly ministry died again later. Contrary to humans, who were *appointed* to die once, Jesus voluntarily sacrificed His life to settle the debt of sin.

II. Weak Sacrifices

Hebrews 10:1-4

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

1. Having shown the superiority of Christ's priesthood, the author explains the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to animal sacrifices. The phrase *the law* refers to the Law of Moses in this context, not law in general. Nothing was wrong with the Law of Moses regarding what it was intended to achieve. Its holy value is in the facts that (1) God was its ultimate author and (2) *as a shadow of good things to come*, the law points to future greater realities.

The New Testament authors recognize the law's limited and distinct role in God's plan. The law was a temporary guardian meant to lead us to Christ. The law's limited role means that it cannot *make the comers thereunto perfect* since no one has kept the law perfectly—no one, that is, except for Christ.

2. The word *for* introduces a logical conclusion to the current argument regarding the limitations of the Law of Moses. Were the Law of Moses to have been God's "final word" to humanity, God would not have settled the sin issue *once* and for all. The animal sacrifices would need to continue forever.

And since such sacrifices would need to be repeated indefinitely, they do not have the power to perfect God's people.

3. Instead of freeing the people from their guilt, the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses had the opposite effect: they reminded the people of their *sins every year*. The sacrifices highlighted sinfulness rather than fixing the problem of sinful hearts.

4. This verse highlights the main limitation of animal sacrifices. Given that God commanded the animal sacrifices, it may seem strange that the author of Hebrews denies that they *take away sins*. After all, do not Leviticus 16:10 and Numbers 29:11 say that the two goats make "atonement"? But notice again their temporary nature. It's "wash, rinse, repeat" indefinitely.

III. Perfect Sacrifice

Hebrews 10:11-14

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

11. The author continues to draw together the threads of the argument. He does so here by first describing the duties of *every priest*. Under the old covenant, a priest's work was never done. He would perform the same rituals and sacrifices repetitively. The blood offerings he would make were categorized in various ways: the sin offering; the trespass offering; the burnt offering; and the peace offering. The bloodless offerings were the grain offering and the drink offering. None of these rituals or sacrifices could ultimately remove the people's sins. The contrast comes next.

12. By contrast, Christ's priestly service required only a single offering: himself.

He offered this sacrifice one time for the sins of humanity. At that point, His duties were completed, and He took His rightful seat at God's *right hand*.

13. The idea seems to be one of rest now that Christ's work on the cross is completed. He offers no more sacrifices. Instead, He occupies a seat of honor while His Father works to make every knee bow to Christ and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

14. This verse concludes the argument that the author has been making. The numerous animal sacrifices of the old covenant have given way to Christ's *one offering*. This is the offering by which people may be *perfected*, not by the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The people being perfected by Christ are also referred to as *them that are sanctified*. To be sanctified is to be made holy or set apart, and there are two aspects to this.

IV. Implications

Hebrews 10:19-25

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

19. According to Leviticus 16, only the high priest could enter the most holy

place, the dwelling place of God's presence in the tabernacle and temple. This access was only allowed once a year. Because Jesus' sacrifice completely satisfied the penalty for sin that we owed, we can each have access to God that was unthinkable before.

20. The *new and living way* distinguishes the new covenant from the old one. This way is "new" because it was inaccessible before Christ offered himself as a sacrifice. This way is also "living," which means it gives life to those who follow it.

21. The author provides a statement of fact that gives the reason for the imperative of the next verse. Before we go there, however, we take a minute to examine the designation *the house of God*. That was a title for the Jerusalem temple, especially after the return from Babylonian exile (examples: Ezra 3:8; Nehemiah 11:11). But the author of Hebrews uses the designation to refer to people who constitute the church (Hebrews 3:6).

22. This is the resulting imperative; this is what we are to do *with a true heart in full assurance of faith*—an imperative echoed in various ways elsewhere. The imagery of *hearts sprinkled* and *bodies washed* may have its basis in Ezekiel 36:25. The inner cleansing of the heart is matched also by the outer cleansing *with pure water*, which most likely refers to baptism.

23. The verb *hold fast* denotes consistency in adhering to the professed faith. The ability of God's people to be faithful is based on God's faithfulness to uphold His promises. His faithfulness is beyond question (1 Corinthians 1:9; Hebrews 3:6).

24-25. These two verses are logically connected. Think about it: wouldn't it be almost impossible to encourage *one another . . . unto love and to good works* unless we are in the habit of *assembling of ourselves together*? That's the context of supporting each other (Acts 2:42-47).

Involvement Learning

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Into the Lesson

In what ways is a globe, a doll, a flower, and a model airplane like and unlike the real items they represent?

It is important to distinguish “the real thing” from “representations of the real thing.” As we do, we learn that the representations aren’t necessarily counterfeited but are predictive or foreshadowing. In today’s lesson, stay alert for the symbols and shadows to consider the greater truths they represent.

Into the Word

Read Hebrews 9:23-28. Then read Genesis 22:1-14; Exodus 12:1-13; Numbers 21:4-9; Joshua 2:8-21; and Jonah 1:11-17. What is the symbol in this passage?

Key Verse

Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

—Hebrews 9:24

How was that symbol predictive of Jesus?

Read Hebrews 10:11-14. Then read Judges 10:10; 1 Samuel 12:10; 1 Kings 8:47; Psalm 106:6; and Jeremiah 14:20. What is the common theme or phrase in all these verses?

Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Identify the cause(s) and effect(s) mentioned in these verses.

Identify the reactions that result from the effects.

Into Life

Consider the concept of “accountability partners” and how it differs from a “mentor/protégé” relationship.

Who will you ask to be an accountability partner for mutual encouragement in light of Hebrews 10:24-25?

Thought to Remember

Jesus opened the Holy of Holies to us.

Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1-8

Background Scripture: 1 John 2:1-6; 4:7-21

Today's Scripture: 1 John 2:1-6; 4:9-17

I. The Source of New Life

1 John 2:1-2

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1. The author addresses readers as *children* often (1 John 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). The term suggests a close and affectionate connection between the writer and the original audience.

The Greek word translated *advocate* here is the same one translated “Comforter” in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, where it describes the Holy Spirit. Christ’s forgiven people still sin; they recognize as much if they are honest with themselves. When believers sin, they do not require justification once more; instead, as children of God, they receive forgiveness through the intercession of Jesus Christ with the Father.

2. The word *propitiation* now appears in the text. The underlying ancient Greek word is rare in the New Testament. The noun forms appear exclusively here, in Romans 3:25, and 1 John 4:10 and refer to something that turns away wrath. A verb form is in Hebrews 2:17. Central to the gospel message is that Christ’s death

was the once-for-all-time sacrificial offering that shifted our fully deserved punishment for sin onto Him, who is the sinless one (2 Corinthians 5:21). This doctrine is often referred to as “substitutionary atonement.” Christ’s substitutionary atonement is sufficient for all our sins—past, present, and future. This reality is fundamental; this is grace. It is available for *the whole world*, but it is effectual and operative only for those who receive it through faith in the blood.

II. The Proof of New Life

1 John 2:3-6

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

3. The author uses the verb translated *know* about two dozen times in the five short chapters of 1 John. These mostly affirm the Christian’s confident faith in Christ and assurance of salvation. Here,

the question is what assures us that Jesus is indeed our advocate and propitiation when we sin. The answer is that keeping Jesus' commandments is our proof. If Jesus is Savior, then He must also be Lord.

4. This verse restates and reinforces 1 John 1:6. Some believers among John's original readers may have separated faith in Christ from obedience to Christ. Perhaps thinking their "good" spirits were completely separate from their "evil" bodies, they lived as if their actions had no bearing on their relationship to Christ. Nevertheless, the contents of a person's heart will eventually become apparent through their actions. Therefore, the writer completely rejects the idea that someone's actions would not align with their declared faith.

5. By contrast, our following Jesus' teaching expresses the effect of everything He has done. Jesus' death for sinners was the fullest expression of God's love for humanity, and Jesus' teaching instructs us how to express God's love to others. This makes God's love for humanity our love for humanity. The ancient Greek word translated *perfected* can take various shades of meaning, depending on context. Here and elsewhere, the sense is that of a finished task because its goal has been achieved.

6. To confess Christ means to obey Christ. *To walk, even as he walked*, is to follow His example (John 13:15).

The author fronts this conclusion by introducing a Greek word translated as "abide"; he uses this word 23 times in this letter. In doing so, he speaks of a close, ongoing connection. This image originated from Jesus as He compared His followers to branches connected to Him as the vine (John 15:1-11). The author's linkage to Jesus' teachings clarifies that a believer cannot keep Jesus' commandments or follow in Jesus' footsteps through his or her own strength. Doing

so is only feasible by remaining in Christ and letting God's Spirit produce fruit in and through the believer. This teaching applies to everyday life. Those who abide in Jesus will inevitably live their life in ways reflecting His love and teaching.

III. Love in Action

1 John 4:9-12

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

9. How can we fail but to see John 3:16 restated here? The supreme expression of God's love is demonstrated through the incarnation: the divine Son of God putting on human flesh to announce and deliver salvation personally. The description of Christ as the *only begotten Son* emphasizes His uniqueness and value to the Father.

10a. An astute observation from years ago is that what is unique about the relationship between the true God and people is that pagan religions tell stories about humanity's search for god(s). In contrast, Christianity tells the story of God's search for us. Christ became incarnate in a world that had rebelled against God. His becoming human is an act of love, and His death on the cross brings that love to its fullest measure. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

10b. John aims to convey to his audience that love is an action, not an empty term. He illustrates this by detailing how God demonstrated His love for the world:

by becoming *the propitiation for our sins*.

11. This implication of the gospel is unmistakable. After receiving God's love, we must recognize our responsibility to love the same people God loves. We do not need to ask who our neighbor is when hearing the command to love our neighbor. God loves all because Christ's death makes atonement available for all. God loves first and loves those who do not love Him. And so must we who have received His love. Even our enemies are objects of God's love and so must be of ours.

12a. Many texts reflect the fact that God cannot be *seen* (examples: Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16). But in Christ, God became a visible, physical human, so to see Christ was truly to see God; the next half-verse expands on this.

12b. The imperative to *love one another* is so important that John uses that phrase five times in this letter. This command is a repeated part of Jesus' message and stressed by others as well (Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22). As we love others, then our actions make God visible to the world.

IV. Certainty of Knowledge

1 John 4:13-17

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

13. The presence of the Holy *Spirit* expresses a new reality. The Spirit's presence in us gives us the certainty that we are in Christ and He is in us. Christ's promise of the Spirit's presence is a fact for all who are Christians and can be a fact for all who are not yet Christians. The Holy Spirit's presence is God's presence. Life in the Spirit is the life of God's love, demonstrating and assuring that we belong to Him through Christ's atoning death.

14. The beginning of this epistle is a stirring declaration that the incarnate Christ, seen by eyewitnesses, is the basis for the gospel message (1 John 1:1-3). In shorter form, the author now repeats that declaration. By using the word *we*, the author declared he had seen Jesus personally and, therefore, his testimony is that of an eyewitness.

15. This verse is a summary statement of the plan of salvation. A doctrinal error often seen is to take such summary statements as being the entirety of that plan. For someone to *confess that Jesus is the Son of God* is good as far as it goes. But remember that demons confess the same thing and are still lost.

16. The author turns to the imperative of *love*. Christ's life, death, and resurrection fully demonstrate God's love. We can say without reservation that *God is love*. For us to confess Christ truly means that we love one another. Such love is found among all who genuinely experience the abiding unity with God brought by Christ. Without such love, our confession is empty. With it, our confession is complete.

17. This is the third time the writer has spoken of perfection with regard to *love*; he will continue to do so in the verse that follows this one. And again, Jesus is our model. These concepts are so foundational that they bear repeating!

Involvement Learning

Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice

Into the Lesson

List questions children ask that are hard for adults to answer simply.

Some things are hard to explain or describe. The way we attempt to do so may indicate some things about what we believe. Today's lesson requires special attention to how the apostle John explains certain ideas and describes certain relationships.

Key Verse

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
—1 John 4:10

Into the Word

Read 1 John 2:1-6. Give a response for each of the following categories:

Things both God and I know

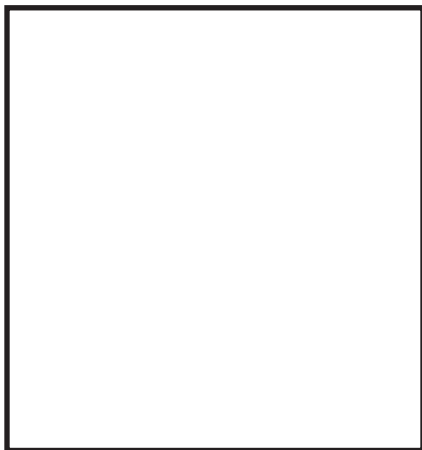
Things that God knows that I don't know

Things that I know that God doesn't know

Things that neither I nor God knows

Read 1 John 4:9-12. In the space below, draw a visual representing the way these verses explain (1) the primary way the love of God has been demonstrated, (2) what that signifies for us, (3) how we

are to respond, and (4) how it is “perfected” or comes to completion.



Read 1 John 4:13-17, then write three things God has done: one thing each by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Into Life

List three habits that Jesus practiced personally, according to 1 John 2:6. Think of practical ways you can adopt these same habits personally in the week ahead.

Thought to Remember

Christ's death for us moves us to a life of love for others.

The Center of the Story

by Editorial Staff

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. At long last, God's redemptive plan is clear. The forces of evil—what Paul calls “principalities and powers”—were rendered powerless before the triumphal work of Christ (Colossians 2:15).

And on Easter, Christians celebrate the first day of a new creation, the Sunday morning when a mournful group of followers met a resurrected Savior walking about alive, risen in the flesh. In the Gospels, Jesus comes with a simple word of greeting, leaving people to fall at his feet in speechless worship of a risen Lord (Matthew 28:9).

This thirteenth-century fresco is found in the monastery in Serbia. It depicts the apprehension and joy of the women who found Jesus' empty tomb. On their way, they were met by the risen Savior Himself.



To recast the words of J. R. R. Tolkien, the followers of Jesus have to ask them-

selves, “Is everything sad going to come untrue?”

The Worthy Lamb

As in vision shown to John on the Island of Patmos, a risen and ascended Jesus is enthroned in heaven. He alone, the lamb who was slain, is undisputably the chosen one, “worthy” to purchase a kingdom of earthly people by the sacrifice of His own blood (Revelation 5:9-10).



Albrecht Dürer, a sixteenth-century master artist of the German renaissance, created the above woodcut depicting the heavenly worship of Jesus, represented as a lamb who was slain.



The prayers of God's people come to Him as offerings, while the elders in heaven sing of Christ's redemption from "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Reading the Old Testament

Christ's work of redemption and His sacrifice to cleanse people from sin forces us to reconsider earlier stories of sacrifice. Like Jesus' first disciples who were forced to rethink everything they thought they knew, Christians can read the Old Testament properly by finding ways that all Scripture points forward to Jesus. This is a way that even Jesus Himself interpreted Scripture: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

For instance, in the life of Jesus' ancestor, King David, God sent a plague as a consequence for sin. David constructed an altar to offer bulls and wheat offerings. But David was faced with a choice: should he pay for the sacrifice, or accept the free gift of someone else (see 1 Chronicles 21:23-24)? Just as David chose to

offer a costly sacrifice for sin, Jesus gave the costliest sacrifice of all, laying aside His own life. Jesus fulfills the meaning of costly sacrifice.

In another example, Solomon became the first king to dedicate a temple to the worship of God. There, before all the priests and people of Israel, fire from heaven came down to consume the animal sacrifices, and the temple became filled with God's glory (2 Chronicles 7:1-2). But the glory of God came to earth in a new way, in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). Instead of worshiping God through animal sacrifices at a physical temple, disciples of Jesus can experience God's presence and worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). Thus Jesus fulfills the meaning of the temple.

The Arch of Titus (seen above) depicts the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70. The glory of God which filled the temple in the days of Solomon came to dwell in the person of Jesus.

Finally, when the people of God returned from exile, they were careful not to neglect the worship of God and festivals that celebrate His deliverance (Ezra 3:1-6). They appointed priests to attend



the fires and the presence of God (3:10-11). All who had been restored to their lands were ready to contribute to the temple's upkeep and the care of the Levitical priests (see Nehemiah 10:37-39).

The image below shows a section of the Western Wall at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is considered one of the holiest sites for modern Jews to pray. The foundations of the original Second Temple were laid when Jews returned in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 3:10-13).

But in the new covenant community of God's people, which includes Jews and Gentiles who have been freed from their slavery to sin (Romans 6:6-7), collections

are also to be taken for the needs among them (see Acts 2:45; 2 Corinthians 8:13-15). Thus by caring for the financial needs of one another, the body of Christ fulfills the meaning of tithes and offerings.

The image above depicts a Jewish coin minted during the first century AD. Just as Jews needed to be faithful to support the needs of the temple and priesthood, Christians support the body of Christ by giving to the needs of one another.

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything, but nothing is diminished or discarded. Only by placing Jesus in the center can the rest of Scripture become clear.



Christ Dies and Rises to New Life

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 2:1-13

Background Scripture: Matthew 27:24—28:10

Today's Scripture: Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54; 28:1-10

I. The Death of the King

Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54

39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, this man calleth for Elias.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49 The rest said, let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, truly this was the Son of God.

39. The parallel account of Matthew 27:39-40 reads almost the same (Mark 15:29-30); the parallel in Luke 23:35 is more abbreviated.

40a. This mockery is based on Jesus' prediction in John 2:19-20. Jesus was indeed on record as promising to raise *the temple* . . . *in three days* were it to be destroyed. But "he spake of the temple of his body" (John 2:21). Jesus is not recorded as saying that He would destroy the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the accusation *thou that destroyest the temple* came from the lips of false witnesses. To speak against a temple in the ancient world was to invite a death penalty (Jeremiah 26:1-11).

40b. The taunt *if thou be the Son of God, come down* mirrors Satan's words during Jesus' temptation at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:3). This challenge can be seen as the final effort by the tempter to thwart God's plan.

45. Matthew 27:41-44 documents further ridicule aimed at Jesus. When we

come to Matthew 27:45, the story shifts to a broader scene.

46. We come to one of the seven cries by Jesus from the cross, also recorded in Mark 15:34. The cry is in Aramaic, which is a later form of the Hebrew language. The words come from the beginning of Psalm 22. Having been surrounded by taunts and darkness for hours, Jesus was enduring a separation from the Father in order to bear the punishment for humanity's sins.

47. One of God's names in the ancient Hebrew language is *Elohim*. When this word occurs in a "construct" sense (that is, combined with another word), one or more letters on the end of *Elohim* may be dropped off in the process of attaching another word. Psalm 22:1, which Jesus was quoting, is of course the most important example. Here is the root of the misunderstanding on the part of *some of them that stood there*. They heard the Aramaic word *Eli* not as a cry to "my God" but as a calling on the name of the long-ago prophet *Elias* (that is, Elijah).

48. We don't know the motive behind the action that we read here. If the *one* performing the action was hostile toward Jesus, then this act of giving *him to drink* was a continued mockery in some way. If the *one* performing the action was sympathetic, it may be intended as an act of kindness. What is called *vinegar* is a cheap kind of wine vinegar of the day.

49. The phrase *let be* indicates some impatience on the part of the mocking bystanders. They don't want the action of satisfying Jesus' thirst to interfere with anything else Jesus had to say or to otherwise distract from the appearance of *Elias*.

50. The words *Jesus* cried out *with a loud voice* are recorded in Luke 23:46: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." John 19:30 further records Jesus as having said, "It is finished," as He died. This verse high-

lights two key aspects: first, Jesus maintained enough physical strength until His death to shout. Second, He remained in control of His life to the very end.

51a. Though Jesus appeared to have been abandoned by God, Matthew offers signs establishing the opposite. *The veil of the temple* separated the temple's holy place from the most holy place. Only the high priest could pass behind that curtain to enter the most holy place—and that just once a year—to offer the sacrificial blood on the Day of Atonement.

51b. The earthquake similarly points to divine action. God was clearly at work. In the Old Testament, earthquakes frequently signified God's presence and sometimes divine judgment (examples: Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 114:7-8; Joel 3:16). Therefore, the first-century crowd witnessing the crucifixion would likely have understood this association.

52-53. Matthew alone tells us of this additional sign. As his description continues, we understand this sign occurred not immediately as Jesus died but a few days later, *after his resurrection*. The designation *the holy city* refers to Jerusalem.

54. A *centurion* was a Roman soldier who commanded a unit known as a "century" in a legion of the Roman army; each "century" consisted of about 80 men. The centurion noted here was likely the one in charge of the crucifixion detail. Processing all he had experienced, the centurion sided against the mockers.

II. The Resurrection of the King Matthew 28:1-10

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and

rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, all hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

1. A long-held view is that the passage of days in the ancient Jewish calendar are marked from sunset to sunset. Therefore, most students recognize that *the sabbath* would have ended at sunset on the day before the action we see here. The women don't set out for their task until *the first day of the week* (Sunday) is in view.

2. Again, an earthquake signaled divine action, given the result we see here. The angel *rolled back the stone from the door* not to let Jesus out but to let Jesus' followers in. They needed to see the tomb empty.

3. There is no mistaking this angel for a human! His face and clothing are bright with light, suitable for supernatural encounters.

4. The Roman governor Pilate had

agreed to set a guard at the tomb to prevent Jesus' followers from removing His body and declaring He had been raised from the dead. These are *the keepers* noted here.

5-6a. As *the angel* told Joseph at the beginning of Jesus' story to *fear not*, this angel tells *the women* the same. The wondrous scene they witnessed fulfilled Jesus' promise to be raised from the dead. Jesus' mysterious promise to die and rise again is now more apparent. It happened not as anyone expected but precisely *as he said*.

6b. The emphasis on the empty tomb counters any notion that Jesus' followers were only experiencing a "spiritual" resurrection of Christ. Jesus' physical resurrection involved the coming to life again of His physical body.

7. The *disciples*, who had abandoned Jesus in the garden, were to be the first whom the women were to *tell* of His resurrection. He had warned them they would fail, yet promised to meet them afterward in Galilee. The angel was saying nothing new but was reaffirming Jesus' previous declarations.

8. The women were filled with fear from such a close encounter with God and joy at what God had done. They obeyed the angel's words implicitly, running—an uncommon act for grown people in their time—to tell the other followers of Jesus.

9. The angel commanded the women to *tell his disciples* that Jesus was alive, and they were on their way to do so without having yet seen Him alive for themselves! But it wasn't long before they received personal confirmation as Jesus himself *met them*, with the women reacting as we read here.

10. Jesus repeats the angel's encouragement and instructions regarding *Galilee*. A key aspect of Jesus' message is His enduring love for His disciples. Despite their abandonment of Him during His crucifixion and their absence at the tomb, Jesus continued to refer to them as His *brethren*.

Involvement Learning

Christ Dies and Rises to New Life

Into the Lesson

Consider your favorite stories from a book or movie. What makes the story special and what's the most memorable scene? How often do you return to that story? Does it affect you differently whenever you watch/read it again?

Into the Word

List details unique to each Gospel's account of the resurrection:

Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54

Mark 15:29-30, 33-39

Luke 23:35, 44-48

John 19:28-30

Read Matthew 28:1-10. List details that the passage in the header mentions but the passages in the other three Gospels do not.

Matthew 28:1-10

Mark 16:1-11

Luke 24:1-12

John 20:1-13

Key Verse

As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

—Matthew 28:9

Into Life

Find hymns or praise songs that help you celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Compile titles and make a list to share with the group next week.

Thought to Remember

Focus on the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Lamb Is Worthy

Devotional Reading: Psalm 118:15-29

Background Scripture: Revelation 5

Today's Scripture: Revelation 5:1-10

I. Who Is Worthy?

Revelation 5:1-4

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

1. When we see the word *book*, we naturally think of a modern book with edge-binding, numbered pages, etc. But the word being translated is also translated as “scroll” in Revelation 6:14, and that interpretation is also applicable in this context. A scroll is typically made from flattened papyrus or animal skins and is opened and closed by being unrolled and rolled.

2. The dramatic action in the rest of this scene is set up by this proclamation of a *strong angel*, who is unnamed. The use of the word *worthy* makes his question not so much an open invitation as it is a rhetorical challenge. The term *wor-*

thy in this context encompasses not just moral excellence but also signifies someone who possesses the authority and power to break the seals.

3. The search for someone worthy seems at first to fail. The mention of *heaven, earth, and under the earth* was a typical method of depicting the domains of heavenly beings, earthly beings, and the world of the deceased (compare Exodus 20:4, 11; Psalm 146:6). But to focus on the scientific nature of each of the three locations is to miss the bigger picture. That bigger picture is “anywhere you can think of.” This description, therefore, highlights the entirety of the cosmos, as it does in Philippians 2:10. Every part of creation has been explored, and no one qualified has been found—yet.

4. People are described as weeping in many places in the Bible. But the phrase *wept much* is an intense form found elsewhere in the New Testament only at Matthew 2:18; Mark 5:38; and Philippians 3:18. The sense can be one of the duration of the weeping or depth of distress or both.

One theory that might explain John's reaction concerns what he was told at the beginning of the throne-room scene. There, he was told that future events would be revealed to him (Revelation 4:1). But now, in the verse before us, John's expectations become frustrated. If

John connects the scroll's contents with knowledge of future events and no one can open the scroll, then the promise will not be fulfilled. Even he, John, was not *worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon*. John's weeping is consistent with what he knows and doesn't know. But that is about to change.

II. Christ Is Worthy Revelation 5:5-10

5 And one of the elders saith unto me, weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

9 And they sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

5. John is comforted by *one of the 24 elders* present around God's throne (Revelation 4:4, 10). Someone is indeed worthy, the elder claims, and he refers to this

person with two important designations.

The first designation, *the Lion of the tribe of Juda*, comes from Genesis 49:9-10, where Jacob refers to his son Judah as a "lion's welp" and compares him to a lion that no one dares rouse. This metaphor is immediately followed by the promise that Judah will always have the right of rulership.

The other designation, *the Root of David*, confirms that the Messiah is in view. This description comes from Isaiah 11:1, 10, another text viewed as a prophecy about the coming Messiah. The designation "the root and the offspring of David" is explicitly claimed by Jesus near the book's end (Revelation 22:16).

6a. The reader first encounters *the four beasts* and *the elders* in Revelation 4:4-6. The word *beasts* implies that these beings are neither humans nor angels. In the book of Revelation, the number "four" is symbolic of the entirety of the earth and its inhabitants. Combining that observation with the creatures' multitudes of eyes indicates that they are watching the entire earth; nothing is hidden from them. This symbolizes the all-knowing nature of the Lord, His omniscience.

6b. The description of the Lamb combines the number *seven* (symbolizing perfection or completeness) with *horns* (symbolizing power) and *eyes* (symbolizing divine knowledge). The exact meaning of the *seven Spirits of God* is difficult to determine. Some students take this phrase to be the same as the sevenfold Spirit depicted in Isaiah 11:2-3; this viewpoint allows a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

7. The Lamb demonstrates His worthiness by receiving the scroll *out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne*. All present, including John, undoubtedly watch in amazement as the Lamb does this audacious thing! However, this is not

an act of thievery or usurpation, for God has been waiting for the Lamb. The scroll and its contents belong to the Lamb.

8a. With the transfer of the scroll, worship in Heaven resumes. But now *the four beasts and four and twenty elders* bow *before the Lamb*. This is not to recognize a transfer of power that diminishes the authority of the one on the throne. Rather, it recognizes the Lamb's authority and His unity with the one on the throne.

The number of elders, 24, is double the number 12, which may represent the people of God from both the Old and New Testaments. Israel, the covenant people of the Old Testament era, was comprised of 12 tribes. Christians, the covenant people of the New Testament era, are linked with the 12 apostles (Luke 6:13; compare Revelation 21:14), who are the foundation of the church. Jesus himself combines the idea of 12 tribes with 12 apostles in His description of the future (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30).

8b. Following the transfer of the scroll, new details unfold before John's eyes. The elders now have *harps*, which they presumably use for worship music, given that harps were common as instruments of worship.

The fact that the elders also hold *golden vials full of odours* offers the reader a rarity in the book of Revelation: the two words *which are*. These two words indicate that an explanation of the symbolism comes next. In several passages, the "which are/is" language explains symbolism with more symbolism. But that isn't the case here, given the unambiguous identification of *the prayers of the saints*. The context implies that the Lamb receives those prayers; He doesn't ignore them.

9a. Worship of the Lamb includes singing. What the elders sing is not an old favorite but *a new song*. This imperative is stressed throughout the Psalter (Psalms

33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9). Revelation 14:3 is an additional implementation. However, in that instance, it's the 144,000 redeemed who are singing while the four beasts and the elders (apparently) listen.

9b. The reality that the Lamb had been slain would have been perceived as a source of embarrassment by many. But the heavenly court praises the Lamb not in spite of His death but because of it. Christ's obedient death is humanity's victory over sin-guilt. The Lamb's unique obedience to the Father made Him worthy to take the book and *open the seals thereof*.

9c. The song now recognizes the diverse nature of those who have been redeemed. The diversity is fourfold in that they come from every family group (*kindred*), every language group (*tongue*), every demographic (*people*), and every ethnic group (*nation*). This heavenly mix is drawn from the entire world.

10a. This half-verse yields three problems regarding the original author's words per the various Greek manuscripts. The first challenge concerns the word *us*. In some manuscripts, it's the Greek word translated "them" instead.

The second minor challenge is that the phrase *unto our God* does not appear in the oldest manuscripts. The third challenge is that the oldest manuscripts have the Greek word for *kingdom* instead of *kings*. In any case, we will be treated like royalty when God's kingdom is manifested in its fullest; note the golden crowns the elders wear in Revelation 4:4!

10b. To serve as a royal priesthood comes with a promise: God's people will one day *reign on the earth*. Christ made this promise explicitly in the letter to the church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:21), and it appears elsewhere in the New Testament as well (2 Timothy 2:12). This is an astonishing and humbling responsibility (compare Luke 19:17).

Involvement Learning

The Lamb Is Worthy

Into the Lesson

Which of the three “Life is like . . .” completions most closely matches your experiences?

Life is like . . .

- *riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.*
- *a game of chess. Always think before you make a move.*
- *a cactus. It’s beautiful but thorny.*

Into the Word

As we come to each of the following words in Revelation 5:1-10, write the Scripture reference where the word occurs in that text and in Revelation 4.

throne

seven

elders

beasts

worthy

Write down Scripture references under the appropriate header as you read through Revelation 5:1-10.

New to Me

Comforting to Me

Disturbing to Me

Key Verse

They sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

—Revelation 5:9

Into Life

In the spirit of the “new song” of Revelation 5:9, write a couple of lines of lyrics of a new song of praise.

Thought to Remember

Jesus alone is worthy of all honor and praise.

David's Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: 2 Peter 3:11-18

Background Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:1—22:1

Today's Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:14-30

I. The Destroying Angel

1 Chronicles 21:14-17

14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

14. The *pestilence* the Lord delivered upon Israel was labeled earlier as the “sword of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 21:12). Although not described, the implication is that of a fast-moving malady that kills quickly. The parallel passage, 2 Samuel 24:15, notes the plague’s reach “from Dan even to Beersheba”—a straight-line

distance of about 150 miles, encompassing the whole of Israel. In the small geographic footprint of David’s realm, every village and every citizen would have felt loss because of these deaths. The sorrowful outcry from survivors would have been deafening and impossible for the king to ignore.

15a. This half-verse reveals the time has come for Jerusalem to experience God’s anger as *an angel* of death appears on the scene. It’s unfitting to take the word *destroy* in the sense of “demolishing buildings” since the parallel in 2 Samuel 24:16 establishes that the focus is on the people themselves.

15b. A threshing floor was a flat, hard piece of ground, ideally one of stone. Every harvest, the dried bundles of grain would be threshed here. This process involved laying the grain out and having it beaten or trampled by oxen to separate the ripened seeds from the stalks. The process also involved winnowing. When the process was complete, grains could be ground into flour for making bread. A threshing floor was thus an essential piece of food production that could last from harvest to harvest.

The fact that a *Jebusite* owned this *threshing floor* is revealing. Jebusites are mentioned over 40 times in the Old Testament. They were not Israelites; rather,

they were one of the tribes inhabiting the promised land that the Israelites were commanded to drive out.

16a. Comparing 1 Chronicles 21:16-17 with its parallel section in 2 Samuel 24:17 yields some interesting results. The most obvious difference is one of length: this part of the story is about twice as long in our lesson-text than the version in that parallel verse.

16b. This scene is absent altogether in the parallel verse of 2 Samuel 24:17. *Sackcloth* is the garment of mourning. It is made from rough, loose-fitting cloth—modern burlap may be similar. Sackcloth was the exact opposite of the finery of kings' robes or of the luxurious garments of a nation's leaders.

In the verse before us, the wearing of sackcloth is combined with falling prostrate—itself a sign of humility before God or other people. The combined aspects of wearing sackcloth and falling facedown are rare in Scripture; this indicates the extreme nature of the situation at hand. The reaction of *David and the elders of Israel* to the angel is submission, not defiance. They surrendered to the judgment of the Lord.

17. The parallel in 2 Samuel 24:17 says much the same as the verse at hand but is more succinct. Both stress David's confession that he and he alone was responsible for the unholy census he had taken. His advisor Joab had warned him against doing that and had even left one tribe uncounted. But David quickly rejected Joab's counsel.

II. The Fiery Altar

1 Chronicles 21:18-27

18 Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

19 And David went up at the saying of

Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.

20 And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat.

21 And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.

22 Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.

23 And Ornan said unto David, take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

24 And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.

25 So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

26 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.

27 And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

18. The severity of David's sin demanded more than words of repentance and submissive body postures. So *the Lord* made His expectations clear to *David* through the prophet *Gad*. For David to go up means that a bit of an uphill hike was to be part of his overall task.

19. *David* realized that *Gad* was not offering his own expert opinion but was speaking *in the name of the Lord*. The phrase *went up at the saying* indicates complete obedience. The Lord had chosen a specific site.

20-21. This seems to have been a workday for *Ornan . . . and his four sons*. As they were *threshing wheat*, they perhaps

did not notice at first the presence of *the angel*. We can scarcely imagine the shock of turning around and simultaneously seeing both an angel and the king! The parallel passage 2 Samuel 24:20 adds that David was accompanied by servants, adding to the shock.

22. David wasted no time in making known the reason for his visit. He could have “pulled rank” and confiscated Ornan’s property, but David offered *the full price*. He intended to carry out the Lord’s instructions through Gad but with justice and integrity. And if there was any time in David’s life when he had to act with unquestionable integrity, this was it, considering the lives that were at stake.

23. We now see the extent of Ornan’s threshing operation. We also gain insight into the person of Ornan himself. Although he is a non-Israelite, he was familiar with Israel’s sacrificial system. He knew how *oxen* and *wheat* could be used in differing types of *offerings*. Burnt offerings require wood for fire, and Ornan offered his *threshing instruments* for that purpose.

24-25. David resisted any urge to use his position to pay anything less than *the full price* to Ornan and his family. The sin at issue was David’s, and his repentance was to cost him. Ancient weights found in archaeological digs reveal that a shekel’s weight is about 11.34 grams, which converts to 0.365 troy ounces in today’s measurements. So the *six hundred shekels of gold by weight* paid by David would have been about 219 troy ounces of gold. Assuming gold today sells for about \$2,000 per troy ounce, David’s offer would be the equivalent to more than \$400,000 today!

However, when we look at the parallel account in 2 Samuel 24:24, we see a difference: a sale price of only “fifty shekels of silver.” In the verse before us now,

the price in gold is *for the place*, while the parallel text says the price in silver was “for the threshing floor and the oxen.” So our text here indicates a more significant purchase of the land where the threshing floor was located.

26. We are not given the details of the *altar* David built. Given the urgency of the situation, we may speculate that it was hastily constructed from nearby materials.

27. There could be no better outcome than this.

III. The Sword of the Lord 1 Chronicles 21:28-30

28 At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.

29 For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon.

30 But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

28-29. Although this story is about David’s sin, its consequences, and its resolution, it has other important information too. This story represents a transitional phase between tabernacle and temple as the proper house of the Lord, and between Jerusalem and *Gibeon* (five miles to the north) regarding location. The tabernacle made by *Moses* four hundred years earlier was still at the *high place* in Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:13), not yet transferred to Jerusalem. Also in Gibeon was *the altar of burnt offering*, the concept of which also dated to Moses.

30. David doesn’t seem to believe he’s been forgiven fully! So the man who slew a bear, a lion, and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) shrinks back in fear of *the sword of the angel of the Lord*. Seeing the angel’s power has made David cautious.

Involvement Learning

David's Sacrifice

Into the Lesson

Do you have a “clueless boss” story?
Describe an example in the space below.

We usually use the word clueless to describe someone who has no idea what is happening. Today's lesson will reveal a decision by a boss that went beyond clueless, all the way to being deadly sinful. It will be a fair warning to us today.

Into the Word

Read today's text, then set a timer for one minute and answer the following questions.

- How many died as a result of David's sin?
a. 70,000 b. 170,000 c. none
- What stood between heaven and earth?
a. prophet b. stairway c. angel
- What did David build?
a. temple b. altar c. tower
- What did David buy?
a. tabernacle b. food c. threshing floor
- David refused to offer a sacrifice that cost him what?
a. nothing b. anything c. everything
- Who did David say shared the blame for his sin?
a. Gad b. the people c. no one

Why would God kill 70,000 innocent people because of the sin of someone else?

Key Verse

King David said to Ornan, nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.
—1 Chronicles 21:24

Into Life

List modern examples of people suffering the consequences of wrongdoing committed by others.

Choosing one of the examples, write an intercessory prayer asking God to show you how you can be his hands and feet to solve the problem.

Thought to Remember

Our sin affects others.

Sacrifice Worthy of Praise

by Jason Hitchcock

Ask almost any Christian what Jesus has done, and you will likely hear about His “sacrifice.” This noun comes from the Latin word meaning “an offering to a deity,” but it is also used in a general sense to mean “something given in exchange for something else.” But don’t make the mistake of reading that metaphorical meaning back into Scripture. Rather, *sacrifice* was a vivid reality and a concrete image to all of Scripture’s original audiences.

Sacrifice in the Ancient World

Many ancient Near Eastern people practiced sacrifices because they believed their gods depended on these offerings for food. The texts and inscriptions of ancient Sumerian, Egyptian, Akkadian, and Hittite people all describe gods with human-sounding needs for food, clothing, and shelter.



Why did ancient people offer sacrifices? Well, otherwise, their gods would get hungry. *Why did the people build temples and sanctuaries?* They knew their gods wanted fine houses in which to live. Most natural forces of the world—like the weather—were attributed to the actions of gods who could be pacified and appeased or hostile and malevolent, depending on whether or not their needs were met.

In this context, idols of wood or stone would mediate the presence of the deity in physical form. Idols could be washed, clothed, housed, and kept safe. Deities would receive food in the form of sacrifices and savor the fragrant odors of these offerings.

Sacrifice in the Life of Israel

Perhaps it is surprising that the God of Israel chose to request sacrifices at all. Nowhere in Scripture do the writers indicate that the God of Israel needs food or relies on humans to satisfy a need. Instead, the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 19–24) treats sacrifices as either (1) expressions of praise to a God who had rescued His people and chosen them for His own, or (2) a method of cleansing to allow a sinful people to remain in relationship to a holy God. Atoning sacrifices were not about God’s needs but the needs of His people.

With this context in mind, we can imagine that the Hebrew people approached the smoking and thundering Mount Sinai prepared to agree to whatever their God required. But the covenant stipulations they

heard—summarized by the ten “commandments” or “words” (Exodus 20:1-17)—were instructions *not* to make an idol or try to persuade God into doing what they wanted. Instead, God provided them with a series of common-sense directives for life as a community.

The creation of a priesthood, tabernacle space, and the Day of Atonement allowed the Israelites—still sinful people—to meet with God. God’s sacred space would have a home with them, first in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

Sacrifice Today

The exile of Judah and destruction of Solomon’s temple halted the sacrificial system. Returning Jews were eager to restart the daily offerings and restore proper sacrifices, but this never fixed the underlying sin problem common to all people.

Nowhere in the pagan religions of the ancient world had a deity ever offered himself or herself as a sacrifice on behalf of humans. That line of thinking upends expectations regarding sacrifices, for weren’t sacrifices supposed to give the gods what *they* wanted?

Jesus’ sacrifice shows that God’s most pressing desire was not to be appeased or set free of His labor. What God wanted most was a restoration of His creation through the defeat of the powers of sin and death.

Jesus became the most enduring image of God’s love by offering himself as a sacrifice on behalf of others. Thus was the plan of God to present Christ as the “propitiation through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25). Because of His sacrifice, Jesus alone is worthy to sit as judge and receive praise and honor (Revelation 5:12).

Sacrifice: Then and Now

continued from page 19

Offerings and the Sanctuary

The final unit of the quarter looks at the unique relationship between the sanctuary and offerings or sacrifices. King David’s choices led him to bear responsibility for his sin. An angel of the Lord spoke through the prophet Gad and told David to “set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (1 Chronicles 21:18; see lesson 10). David refused to accept a gift from Ornan for a sacrifice to the Lord because David would not “offer burnt offerings without cost” (21:24).

Lesson 11 will consider the dedication of Solomon’s temple and the lavish sacrifices

that took place as part of that ceremony (2 Chronicles 7:1-7). However, after the people were exiled to Babylon, that temple was left in shambles. The foundation of a new temple would need to be laid by the people who had returned from exile. When the foundation of that temple was laid, the people celebrated the goodness of God, proclaiming that “his mercy endureth for ever” (Ezra 3:11; see lesson 12).

The quarter concludes with recounting the people’s covenant renewal and their pledge to observe the commands of the Law of Moses and reject the abuse and neglect of the house of God (Nehemiah 10:28-39; see lesson 13).

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-27

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-20

Today's Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

I. Glory of God 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

1 Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house.

2 And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

1a. As we read about *the fire that came down from heaven* to consume *the burnt offering and the sacrifices*, we're naturally inclined to compare and contrast this event with other such episodes in the Bible. Fire of divine origin was often for the purpose of judgment. Examples of this kind of fire stated in a personal way as being from the Lord or similar are Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1; 16:35; and Psalm 21:9. Examples of judgmental fire more generally said to be from heaven are 2 Kings 1:10-14; Luke 9:54; 17:29; and Revelation 20:9. But the fire in the lesson text at hand is

in the minority of cases that are not judgmental, but showing divine favor instead.

Burnt offerings were a specific type of sacrifice whereby the entire offering was consumed by fire on the altar. By making such an offering, the people acknowledged their sin and the need for its removal. In the context at hand, it should have convicted the original audience of the need to enter the temple with holy attitudes and intent if they were to live in a healthy relationship with God and each other. The dramatic descent of the fire signaled that God was watching.

1b. The dramatic intensity of the fire from Heaven, just considered, was enhanced (if that were possible!) when *the glory of the Lord filled the house*. The concepts of fire and *glory* are combined in several places in the Bible (examples: Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 5:24; Isaiah 4:5; Zechariah 2:5; 1 Peter 1:7).

2. At first glance, 1 Kings 8:11 seems parallel to the verse before us because the idea conveyed is identical. But 1 Kings 8:11 is actually parallel to 2 Chronicles 5:11, 13b-14 in the flow of events. All are similar in outcome to what we see here: *the priests could not enter the house of the Lord*, with echoes of Exodus 40:35.

3. The text shifts its focus to those gathered, *the children of Israel*. Their experience of seeing the *fire that came down* and *the*

glory of the Lord prompted them to renew their life of worship. (“Renew” is the right word because they had prayed and sacrificed before, but henceforth they would do so in a more profound way.)

The people sang an often-repeated phrase found also in Psalm 136. The song also preceded Solomon’s prayer (2 Chronicles 5:13). It was part of the singing when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:34). It was sung again centuries later as the altar was being rebuilt following return from exile (Ezra 3:11). The event of the consecration of the temple was a reminder of God’s goodness and *mercy* in the past and for the future.

II. Worship by People

2 Chronicles 7:4-6

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

5 And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

6 And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood.

4. The *sacrifices* that followed differ from those incinerated by fire from Heaven (burnt offerings) in that some of the sacrifices in view here could be eaten. After God put His stamp of approval on the temple by consuming the initial sacrifices, the people joined in.

There are usually clear delineations of the duties of the three offices of *prophet*, *priest*, and *king* in ancient Israel. In the

laws of sacrifice in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the king had no role—indeed, there was no provision for ancient Israel even to have a king in those three books. The story of King Uzziah’s leprosy after his attempted sacrifice (2 Chronicles 26:16-23) reveals that a king was not to usurp the role of a priest. But there were some exceptions, and that seems to have been the case here as *the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord*. The sheer number of sacrificial animals may have overwhelmed the number of priests available. If so, a practical adjustment was made (compare 30:2-3).

We might easily misunderstand the purposes of sacrifice and dismiss the practice as barbaric or see it merely as a way of appeasing God’s anger. Sacrifice was a form of worship. The people had to take something that was valuable to them and either give it over to God entirely or to both God and other people.

5. The number of animals would have fed many thousands of people, making this event a celebration for a large percentage of Solomon’s subjects. The dedication ceremony was designed to shape the life of the entire kingdom, including those not able to be present in Jerusalem. Solomon rightly understood that celebrating such an important event as the dedication of the temple in grand style should bring the people together in more ways than one.

6a. This verse stands on the shoulders of 1 Chronicles 15:3-22. That passage describes in great detail how *David the king* organized *the Levites* as temple musicians in conjunction with his second (and successful) attempt at bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. The musical instruments mentioned there are “psalteries and harps and cymbals” (1 Chronicles 15:16). These instruments were also present at the first (and failed) attempt to relocate the ark, with

two additional instruments mentioned in that context: timbrels and trumpets (13:8). The Old Testament mentions at least 14 distinct musical instruments a total of over 200 times.

Singing isn't mentioned in this verse. But since the first attempt to relocate the ark involved singing (1 Chronicles 13:8), as did the second attempt (15:22), it's more than reasonable to presume that singing also occurred here.

6b. *Priests* are associated with *trumpets* about a dozen times in the Old Testament. There were two kinds of trumpets used for different purposes. First were the trumpets of silver; these were for calling the people to assemble, for setting out, to announce times of rejoicing at festivals, and for signaling in battle (Numbers 10:1-10). These are the trumpets in view here.

The second kind was trumpets made from rams' horns. These are mentioned in dozens of places, but in connection with priests only in Joshua 6.

III. Actions by Solomon 2 Chronicles 7:7, 11

7 Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brasen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat.

11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

7. The horizontal surface of the altar Solomon had built measured 20 cubits by 20 cubits, or about 900 square feet (2 Chronicles 4:1). Although it was quite

large, it was not large enough for the work of that day of dedication. Thus, Solomon needed a plan to deal with this. So, with priestly help, he *hallowed* (meaning "consecrated" or "sanctified") *the middle of the court[yard]* to be suitable as an overflow altar. This practice was not provided for in the Law of Moses, but 2 Chronicles sees it as an appropriate emergency measure. The aim of the event was more important than the silence of the law in this regard.

Three types of offerings are noted. *Burnt offerings* were characterized by being totally consumed by the fire; regulations are in Leviticus 1 and 6:8-13. Regarding *meat offerings*, we note that the *King James Version* uses the word *meat* at times to stand for any food, even grain. Regulations for this kind of offering are in Leviticus 2 and 6:14-23. *Peace offerings* were offerings of thanksgiving or were connected with the taking of vows; regulations are in Leviticus 3 and 7:11-21.

11. The passages 2 Chronicles 5:3; 7:8-10 indicate that the temple dedication occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three annual pilgrimage feasts. Solomon had committed himself fully to the completion of the temple, focusing all his resources to that effort. But more than it being about a building, it was also about a people. He recruited many artisans and craftsmen to help as they used their skills for God's glory.

Solomon, like any other king, also built a palace (*the king's house*). His palace had a footprint more than four times that of the temple (see 1 Kings 6:2; 7:2). Compared to the seven years it took to build the temple, the 13 years to build his palace is understandable!

The palace had to be larger than the temple because it needed to house the king, his numerous wives, many officials, etc. A palace was not just a grandiose house but a small city within the city.

Involvement Learning

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Into the Lesson

List songs (religious or secular) that people might sing spontaneously right after a startling experience, either good or bad. The song could be sung in a context that the songwriter did not envision.

Today, we're going to consider an event that resulted in spontaneous singing. Let's see how the ancient Israelites connected singing to a major positive event in their nation's history.

Key Verse

When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the Lord, saying, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.
—2 Chronicles 7:3

Into the Word

Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11. As you read, write down verse numbers in one of the following categories, according to which of the five senses would have been most activated by the verse you are reading at the moment.

Touch

Taste

Sight

Sound

Smell

Into Life

Compare and contrast the events of the text with the worship experiences you have had. What elements of the worship in today's text give us valid ideas for our own worship?

What are some ways to respond best to God's presence and love with worship and sacrifice?

What are some specific things we can do on Saturday night to prepare ourselves better for worship on Sunday morning?

Thought to Remember

Respond to God with worship.

Worship Is Restored

Devotional Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

Background Scripture: Ezra 3:1-13

Today's Scripture: Ezra 3:1-6, 10-13

I. Rebuilding the Altar Ezra 3:1-6

1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a free-will offering unto the LORD.

6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the founda-

tion of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

1. The story's setting in *the seventh month* places it in late September or early October. By this time, the Jews had two calendars: a civic calendar and a religious calendar. The reference here is to the seventh month of the religious calendar, the first month on the civic calendar. By name, the month was called "Ethanin" before the exile and "Tishri" after the exile.

By the time of the event described in the verse before us, those who had returned from exile had already dispersed to live in their ancestral villages (Ezra 2:70). Apparently, few wanted to live in Jerusalem itself, leading to a situation where one in every ten individuals was eventually selected by lot to inhabit the city.

This seventh month of the Jewish religious year included four observances that would have drawn the people to Jerusalem. These were the blowing of trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, the feast of tabernacles on days 15 through 21, and an assembly of the eighth day on day 22. But the reason *the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem* may not be any of these.

2a. The important leaders *Jeshua the son of Jozadak* and *Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel* are mentioned together in a dozen Old

Testament verses. These occurrences reveal that Jeshua was the high priest and Zerubabel was the governor. In these passages, we see Judah's religious leader and political leader working together to ensure the successful rebuilding of community and religious life. That rebuilding included *the altar of God of Israel* in its traditional place in the temple courtyard, even though the temple remained in ruins.

We may call their activity here "leadership by example." The reconstruction of the altar was necessary, and it appears that the direct engagement of these two leaders played a key role in making it happen. When we read of the temple that "Solomon built in Jerusalem" (1 Chronicles 6:10), it suggests he funded and authorized the temple's construction rather than doing the physical work himself. However, considering the activities mentioned in the verse before us, the term *built* appears to have a more personal connotation.

2b. The function of the altar *to offer burnt offerings thereon* clarifies that this was the altar of burnt offerings, not the golden altar of incense, given how each had been used in both tabernacle and temple. These two altars are distinguished *in the law of Moses* in Exodus 27:1-8; 30:1-10; 37:25-28; 38:1-7; 40:5-6. The Law of Moses gave specifications for the construction and function of the altar (Leviticus 1).

3. The fact that *the altar* was constructed *upon his bases* reveals reconstruction on the footprint of the one destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. The rebuilt altar thus became the fixed point around which the rest of the rebuilding work could proceed.

The duration of time required to rebuild the altar is uncertain. Workers might have labored rather quickly because *fear was upon them because of the people of those countries*. We read the actions of those enemies later (Ezra 4:1-5; Nehemiah 4; etc.).

4. *The feast of tabernacles* was one of the three annual pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. Exodus 23:15-17 and 34:18-25 name these three feasts.

At first reading of those passages, it may appear that there are more than three feasts and that the feast of tabernacles is not among them. But there are indeed three considering that (1) the two feasts of unleavened bread and passover were often regarded as a singular observance, as they took place consecutively, and (2) the various feasts go by different names.

5. This verse indicates the comprehensive reintroduction of the functions of the altar as established in Numbers 28 and 29. The sacrificial system was fully reinstituted from the earliest possible moment after the Judeans had reestablished themselves.

The sacrifices also required the reestablishment of animal husbandry and pasture management throughout the area around Jerusalem. This fact, in turn, implies a restoration of the basic mechanisms of ensuring that shepherds were paid, flocks protected, water sources managed, and so on. A return to something approaching normal life had begun.

6a. This verse supports the suggestion that the primary reason for the people to have "gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem" (Ezra 3:1) was not the feast of tabernacles but the feast of trumpets.

6b. The rebuilding of the altar allowed the Judeans to restart the prescribed worship of God. However, a gap remained in that *the temple of the Lord* was absent. Its destruction in 586 BC had been complete. Even its *foundation*, originally *laid* in 966 BC, would need to be laid anew.

II. Laying a Foundation Ezra 3:10-13

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD,

they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

10. The laying of *the foundation of the temple of the Lord* took about a year and a half. The identity of *the builders* and the source of at least some of the construction material is found in Ezra 3:7-9. The *apparel for the priests* undoubtedly included the 100 priestly garments donated in Ezra 2:69.

The *trumpets* are not the kind made from a ram's horn. Instead, the word being translated for *trumpets* is the same one that refers to those made from silver in Numbers 10:1-10. *The ordinance of David king of Israel*, for the organization of musicians, is found in 1 Chronicles 6:31-46. *Levites* as temple musicians are associated with various musical instruments in 2 Chronicles 29:25. By adhering to David's ordinance, the aim was not to discard the positive aspects of Judah's past but to renew them.

11. Here, we see another renewed connection with the past as the musicians sing of God's *mercy* and enduring goodness. These lyrics go back to King David, centuries earlier (1 Chronicles 16:34, 41).

12. The temple had been destroyed in 586 BC, and the year was about 536 BC as the singing continued. Thus, it had been just about 50 years in between. Those who had been 20 years old when they witnessed the destruction of Solomon's magnificent temple had become *ancient men* of age 70. The fact that they *wept* bitterly is quite understandable. They had to have been thinking of the sins of their generation that resulted in the destruction of that *first house*.

By contrast, those who *shouted aloud for joy* were undoubtedly young enough never to have seen Solomon's temple. The excitement of this accomplishment was to them unprecedented and thrilling.

The computation of the 50-year interval mentioned above doesn't conflict with the prophecy of 70 years of oppression in Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10. The oppression of exile occurred in the three waves of 605, 597, and 586 BC. Similarly, the return from exile occurred in three waves: 538, 458, and 444 BC. Thus, the computation of 70 years depends on selecting which starting and ending points apply.

13. As time progressed beyond this high emotion, it's easy to imagine excitement becoming disappointment and disillusionment. That's because the next 20 years turned out to be a tug-of-war between outsiders on whether or not the work on the temple should continue. Opposition to construction was eventually defeated. Still, the intervening years resulted in lethargy on the part of the Judeans. The Lord himself had to intervene to get the project back on track. The result was that the temple remained unfinished for two decades, not being completed until 516 BC.

Involvement Learning

Worship Is Restored

Into the Lesson

Considering the following puzzle, try to guess the next three-digit number in the sequence.

444 / 458 / 538 / 586 / 597 / ???

Let's see how God blessed a decision to rebuild despite adverse circumstances.

Into the Word

Read Ezra 3:1-6, and write down what you consider the main point of the passage in one minute.

Verse 1: _____

Verse 2: _____

Verse 3: _____

Verse 4: _____

Verse 5: _____

Verse 6: _____

Key Verse

All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

—Ezra 3:11b

Read Ezra 3:10-13, and write down the main point of that passage in one minute.

Verse 10: _____

Verse 11: _____

Verse 12: _____

Verse 13: _____

Into Life

How can you apply to your life the lessons learned from today's text?

What obstacles seem to delay or prevent you from doing so right now?

Write a prayer identifying an area where fear must be overcome so that godly service is not hindered.

Thought to Remember

Praise God for His enduring mercy!

A Covenant Renewal

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 31:27-34

Background Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1—10:39

Today's Scripture: Nehemiah 10:28-39

I. People's Commitment Nehemiah 10:28-29

28 And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

28a. The identifiers here are sometimes distinctive, sometimes overlapping. *The Levites*, those descended from the tribe of Levi, were solely in charge of the items and duties associated with the tabernacle and temple. However, they were not included in a census of Israelites and did not receive an inheritance of land. All *priests* were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. The word translated *porters* is also translated “doorkeepers” in 1 Chronicles 15:24, and that is the sense here; it was one of the specific jobs of certain Levites. The word *singers* includes those skilled in vocal music, instrumental music, or both.

28b. Separation *from the people of the lands unto the law of God* is a key theme in this book. Everyone old enough to understand was to toe the line on this requirement.

29. People of all occupations and demographics swore *an oath* to commit themselves to following the Law of *Moses*. That law, given about 1,000 years prior to the writing of this verse, specified the *curse* for disobedience. The people seem to have been binding themselves to suffering the punishments listed therein should they disobey. The Law of Moses seems to have been ignored and violated more times than it had been honored over the 10 centuries since its giving.

It may be tempting to put the three words *commandments*, *judgment*, and *statutes* under individual microscopes to detect different shades of meaning. But that would be to miss the forest for the trees. The idea, rather, seems to be to leave no requirement out.

II. Law's Restatement Nehemiah 10:30-39

30 And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:

31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them

on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;

33 For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

34 And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law:

35 And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD:

36 Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:

37 And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.

39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

30. The danger of intermarriage is specified in Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4. The threat was that of resulting idolatry. When the Lord tested the Israelites in this regard, they failed. This prohibition helped to mark the boundary between God's holy people and the pagan gods' unholy peoples.

31a. The longest of the Ten Commandments is the fourth, which concerns keeping *the sabbath day*. The Israelites had been warned about failing to honor that day as God had prescribed (Jeremiah 17:19-27). Their failure in that regard was a factor in their exile (Nehemiah 13:16-18). The pagan *people of the land* cared nothing for the Sabbath. Conducting commerce with them showed that God's covenant people cared nothing for it either.

31b. The weekly Sabbath had a counterpart in the Sabbath of *the seventh year*. That was a time when *every debt* owed to a fellow Israelite was to be canceled (Deuteronomy 15:1-3).

32. This verse begins a list of obligations the people agree to for temple upkeep and ongoing operations. The first item is the annual temple tax. A *shekel* was a silver coin weighing about three-eighths of an ounce. At a modern exchange rate of, say, twenty-five dollars per ounce of silver, *the third part* of a shekel would equate to no more than five dollars. But, the changing levels of supply and demand for silver, like other precious metals, fluctuate through time (1 Kings 10:21). Thus, a comparison with modern exchange rates, while

interesting, may be misleading. A better approach is to investigate what could actually be purchased with a shekel, although this too will fluctuate.

33. This verse itemizes expenses incurred for the functioning of the temple. This may all seem to be a lot of repetition. But we need to keep a chronological framework in mind. By Nehemiah's day, the second temple had been completed about 70 years prior, in 516 BC. Thus, at least one generation had passed off the scene, and those who followed needed instruction. Therefore, these reminders:

<i>shewbread:</i>	Leviticus 24:6
<i>continual offerings:</i>	Leviticus 1-2; Numbers 28:1-8
<i>sabbaths:</i>	Numbers 28:9-10; Deuteronomy 5:12-15
<i>new moons:</i>	Numbers 10:10; 28:11-15
<i>set feasts:</i>	Leviticus 23; Numbers 28:16-29:40
<i>sin offerings:</i>	Leviticus 4:1-5:13

34. Leviticus 6:12-13 specifies that the fire on *the altar* at the Lord's sanctuary must never go out. That requirement demanded a lot of *wood*. The payment in wood, therefore, became a shared responsibility. With no objective means for assigning this rotating task, the selection method is to *cast the lots*.

35. The foundation of the offering of *the firstfruits* is found in Exodus 13:1; 22:29; 25:19; and Numbers 17:12-13. The idea is that when a harvest starts, the very first of that harvest goes to God for temple support. Giving the first of the harvest demonstrated trust in God that the rest of the harvest would sustain life. The Israelites even had a specific harvest celebration called Day of Firstfruits; it is the same as the feast of weeks, the feast of harvest, and Pentecost. In the New Testament, the concept is reversed: God gives us the firstfruits of His Spirit (Romans 8:23).

36. The firstfruits principle applied to the firstborn male of children and live-

stock as well (Exodus 13:1-2, 12-13, 15; 22:29). This concept seems alien to modern readers, but it speaks to the life of gratitude that biblical law wishes to cultivate.

The reason the firstborn are to be brought *to the house of our God* is for a redemption ritual as specified in Exodus 13:1-16; 34:19-20; Numbers 18:15-17.

37a. This half-verse offers a sweeping summary of all *firstfruits* expectations specified so far.

37b. Now we come to something new: *tithes*, which have not been mentioned in the book of Nehemiah until this point. But what's new in Nehemiah is well rehearsed in the Law of Moses. *The Levites* were to be wholly devoted to the functioning of the temple. As such, they weren't to be growing crops like everyone else (ideally, that is; contrast Nehemiah 13:10). The giving over of the tithes (one-tenth) of crops, etc., to the landless Levites allowed them to focus full time on their work in the temple (Numbers 18:24; Deuteronomy 18:1-2). Tithes also provided sustenance for the fatherless and widows.

38. When Ezra led the second wave of returnees from exile in 458 BC, he took great care to ensure proper handling of funds (Ezra 8:24-34). The same seems to be evident here.

39. The words translated *corn*, *wine*, and *oil* occur together frequently in the Old Testament in various contexts of blessing (example: Deuteronomy 7:13) and woe (example: 28:51). Since these commodities would tend to arrive in large batches at harvest time, appropriate storage rooms (the chambers) were needed. The rebuilt temple indeed had such rooms (Ezra 8:29). The task of their oversight was the responsibility of four Levites in particular (1 Chronicles 9:26). These rooms were abused later in Nehemiah's absence (Nehemiah 13:6-13).

Involvement Learning

A Covenant Renewal

Into the Lesson

Under the following headers, write down as many Old Testament commands you can remember off the top of your head.

“Thou Shalt . . .”

“Thou Shalt Not. . .”

As you work through today’s text regarding covenant renewal, notice which of these “thou shalts” and “thou shalt nots” were apparently violated. Also, be on the alert for ones that you’ve missed.

Key Verse

We will not forsake the house of our
God.

—Nehemiah 10:39b

Into the Word

Read Nehemiah 10:28-39. What were the three sins that needed to be addressed for covenant renewal?

Was the sin of intermarriage defined in terms of differing religious beliefs, differing cultures, both, or something else?

What dangers did intermarriage present?

In what ways is intermarriage addressed under the new covenant in Christ, considering 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14?

What were the people substituting for a day of Sabbath rest?

If the people wanted to do something on the Sabbath other than rest, what’s wrong with that?

Why is Sabbath-keeping not part of the requirements under the new covenant in Christ, but the other nine of the Ten Commandments are?

Into Life

List one “thou shalt” that you need to *start* doing.

List one “thou shalt not” that you need to stop doing.

Thought to Remember

Commitments translate into action;
action translates into character.

March 3–9

☐ Mon, Mar. 3
☐ Tue, Mar. 4
☐ Wed, Mar. 5
☐ Thu, Mar. 6
☐ Fri, Mar. 7
☐ Sat, Mar. 8
☐ Sun, Mar. 9

March 10–16

☐ Mon, Mar. 10
☐ Tue, Mar. 11
☐ Wed, Mar. 12
☐ Thu, Mar. 13
☐ Fri, Mar. 14
☐ Sat, Mar. 15
☐ Sun, Mar. 16

March 17–23

☐ Mon, Mar. 17
☐ Tue, Mar. 18
☐ Wed, Mar. 19
☐ Thu, Mar. 20
☐ Fri, Mar. 21
☐ Sat, Mar. 22
☐ Sun, Mar. 23

March 24–30

☐ Mon, Mar. 24
☐ Tue, Mar. 25
☐ Wed, Mar. 26
☐ Thu, Mar. 27
☐ Fri, Mar. 28
☐ Sat, Mar. 29
☐ Sun, Mar. 30

Ezekiel 14:1-11
Psalms 26
Ezekiel 43:1-12
Ezekiel 44:15-27
John 2:12-22
John 4:13-26
Exodus 25:1-9; 26:1, 31-37

Hebrews 5
Leviticus 8:1-13
Leviticus 8:14-23
Psalms 133
Hebrews 7:1-14
Hebrews 7:15-28
Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37

1 Peter 2:1-5
Psalms 141
2 Corinthians 2:12-17
Zephaniah 3:14-20
Romans 12:1-8
Romans 12:9-21
Leviticus 1:3-17

Psalms 40:1-8
Psalms 40:9-17
Hebrews 9:1-14
Hebrews 9:15-22
2 Corinthians 5:12-21
Leviticus 16:1-10
Leviticus 16:11-19

March 31–April 6

☐ Mon, Mar. 31
☐ Tue, Apr. 1
☐ Wed, Apr. 2
☐ Thu, Apr. 3
☐ Fri, Apr. 4
☐ Sat, Apr. 5
☐ Sun, Apr. 6

April 7–13

☐ Mon, Apr. 7
☐ Tue, Apr. 8
☐ Wed, Apr. 9
☐ Thu, Apr. 10
☐ Fri, Apr. 11
☐ Sat, Apr. 12
☐ Sun, Apr. 13

April 14–20

☐ Mon, Apr. 14
☐ Tue, Apr. 15
☐ Wed, Apr. 16
☐ Thu, Apr. 17
☐ Fri, Apr. 18
☐ Sat, Apr. 19
☐ Sun, Apr. 20

April 21–27

☐ Mon, Apr. 21
☐ Tue, Apr. 22
☐ Wed, Apr. 23
☐ Thu, Apr. 24
☐ Fri, Apr. 25
☐ Sat, Apr. 26
☐ Sun, Apr. 27

Psalms 96
1 Peter 3:18-22
Isaiah 52:13–53:3
Isaiah 53:4-12
Mark 10:41-45
Hebrews 9:23–10:4
Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

Isaiah 59:1-8
1 Peter 2:19-25
John 3:1-15
John 3:16-21
Romans 3:19-31
Romans 5:1-15
1 John 2:1-6; 4:9-17

Psalms 71:12-24
Hebrews 2:1-13
Genesis 22:1-14
Matthew 26:17-30
Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54
Psalms 49:1-15
Matthew 28:1-10

John 1:29-36
Psalms 118:1-14
Psalms 118:15-29
1 Peter 1:13-25
Psalms 99
Revelation 21:9-16, 21-27
Revelation 5:1-10

April 28–May 4

- ☐ Mon, Apr. 28 Psalm 86:1-7, 10-17
- ☐ Tue, Apr. 29 1 Peter 5
- ☐ Wed, Apr. 30 Lamentations 3:21-36
- ☐ Thu, May 1 2 Peter 3:1-10
- ☐ Fri, May 2 2 Peter 3:11-18
- ☐ Sat, May 3 1 Chronicles 21:1-13
- ☐ Sun, May 4 1 Chronicles 21:14-30

May 5–11

- ☐ Mon, May 5 Ezra 6:14-22
- ☐ Tue, May 6 Psalm 18:1-12
- ☐ Wed, May 7 Acts 7:2-16
- ☐ Thu, May 8 Acts 7:30-41
- ☐ Fri, May 9 Acts 7:42-50
- ☐ Sat, May 10 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-27
- ☐ Sun, May 11 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

May 12–18

- ☐ Mon, May 12 Psalm 30
- ☐ Tue, May 13 Colossians 3:12-17
- ☐ Wed, May 14 2 Corinthians 1:2-14
- ☐ Thu, May 15 Psalm 95
- ☐ Fri, May 16 Philippians 3:1-14
- ☐ Sat, May 17 Ezra 1
- ☐ Sun, May 18 Ezra 3:1-6, 10-13

May 19–25

- ☐ Mon, May 19 Jeremiah 31:27-34
- ☐ Tue, May 20 Ephesians 2:1-10
- ☐ Wed, May 21 Luke 22:7-20
- ☐ Thu, May 22 Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-12
- ☐ Fri, May 23 Nehemiah 9:2-3, 6-17, 32
- ☐ Sat, May 24 Hebrews 8
- ☐ Sun, May 25 Nehemiah 10:28-39

In the Word

Your weekly Sunday school time will be enriched when you come to class each week prepared. One aspect of good preparation is continual contact with the Word of God. Of course, Bible reading is more than preparation. It is a vital link with the Father. Coupled with prayer, it is the most important item on your daily agenda.

There are a variety of Bible reading plans available. We offer this one because it is designed to enhance your weekly Bible study of these lessons with an adult class.

Your devotional time can be enriched if you add to these Bible readings a time of prayer and meditation. The quarterly booklet *Devotions*® combines these same readings with a meditation, daily Scripture verse, a hymn, and prayer thoughts. *Devotions*® is available from your local Christian bookstore or from David C Cook (order no. 3629325; order no. 3629525 for large print).

REMOVE THIS PAGE, FOLD, AND KEEP IN YOUR BIBLE
FOR REFERENCE.

February 24–March 2

- ☐ Mon, Feb. 24 Revelation 1:3-8
- ☐ Tue, Feb. 25 Psalm 106:36-48
- ☐ Wed, Feb. 26 Leviticus 19:1-10
- ☐ Thu, Feb. 27 Leviticus 19:11-18
- ☐ Fri, Feb. 28 Revelation 20:1-6
- ☐ Sat, Mar. 1 Micah 6:1-8
- ☐ Sun, Mar. 2 Exodus 19:1-14

Quarterly Quiz

Lesson 1

1. The people camped in what desert? (Shechem, Sinai, Shiloh) *Exodus 19:2*
2. The Lord said that He would come to Moses in a thick cloud. T/F. *Exodus 19:9*

Lesson 2

1. The Lord said, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may _____ among them." *Exodus 25:8*
2. The curtain was to be hung on pillars made of what wood? (cedar, cypress, shittim) *Exodus 26:32*

Lesson 3

1. The ordination began with offering two young, unblemished bullocks and one unblemished ram. T/F. *Exodus 29:1*
2. How many days did the ordination of Aaron and his sons last? (six, seven, eight) *Exodus 29:35*

Lesson 4

1. A burnt sacrifice from the herd was to be a male "without blemish." T/F. *Leviticus 1:3*
2. What did the priests sprinkle "round about upon the altar"? (blood, water, oil) *Leviticus 1:11*

Lesson 5

1. Aaron slaughtered a bullock for his own _____ offering. *Leviticus 16:11*
2. The cloud from what burning item would conceal the mercy seat? (wool, branches, incense) *Leviticus 16:13*

Lesson 6

1. The Law of Moses is "a _____ of good things to come." *Hebrews 10:1*
2. Believers must consider how to "provoke . . . love" and "good _____" in others. *Hebrews 10:24*

Lesson 7

1. Who is our advocate with God the Father? (Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, ourselves) *1 John 2:1*

2. Believers can know that we "dwell" in God and He in us because of His _____. *1 John 4:13*

Lesson 8

1. Matthew says that the guards at the tomb ran in fear after seeing the angel. T/F. *Matthew 28:4.*
2. After Jesus' resurrection, the brethren would see Him in _____. *Matthew 28:10*

Lesson 9

1. One of the elders in John's vision speaks of "the Root of _____." *Revelation 5:5*
2. What stands "in the midst of the throne [and] . . . the elders"? (Lion, Eagle, Lamb) *Revelation 5:6*

Lesson 10

1. The angel of the Lord held what item in his hand? (sword, scale, scroll). *1 Chronicles 21:16*
2. David paid Ornan six hundred shekels of _____ for the place. *1 Chronicles 21:25*

Lesson 11

1. After Solomon's prayer, what came down from Heaven? (rain, fire, angel) *2 Chronicles 7:1*
2. How many sheep were sacrificed at the dedication of the temple? (120; 1,200; 120,000) *2 Chronicles 7:5*

Lesson 12

1. What month did the people gather "themselves together" in Jerusalem? (sixth, seventh, eighth) *Ezra 3:1*
2. All the people took trumpets and cymbals to praise the Lord. T/F. *Ezra 3:10*

Lesson 13

1. The priests, the Levites, and the people would cast lots to determine who would bring the offering of wood to the house of God. T/F. *Nehemiah 10:34*
2. The people said, "We will not _____ the house of our God." *Nehemiah 10:39*

The World of Moses

