

Leviticus Chapter 24

Ceremonial and Moral Regulations

Chapter 24 has two very different kinds of regulations.

24:1-9 regulates two elements in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle:

- Verses 1-4 are about the lamps
- Verses 5-9 are about the show bread



24:10-23 regulates certain moral conduct:

- Verses 10-16, 23 regulate blasphemy
- Verses 17-22 present the law of equal retaliation

[Holy Place picture from www.musicofthebiblel.com]

Leviticus 24:1-4 The Maintenance of the Golden Lamp

The Holy Place was the outer room of the Tabernacle closed off by an outer curtain separating it from the courtyard and an inner curtain separating it from the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:33), where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This outer room held the altar of incense (not mentioned here) the golden lampstand and the table of showbread (1 Chronicles 9:32). God commanded Moses:



Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand and its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. Six branches shall go out from its sides; three branches of the lampstand from its one side and three branches of the lampstand from its other side (Exodus 24:31-32). [The making of the lampstand is described in Exodus 25.]

The two specific regulations about the golden lamp are:

1. *Command the sons of Israel that they bring to you clear oil from beaten olives (24:2).*
2. *Aaron shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD continually; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations (24:3).*

Walvoord says the *clear oil from beaten olives ... was purer and of better quality than boiled olive oil* (“The Bible Knowledge Commentary” note on 24:1-4). And notice the word *continually* is described with the phrase *a perpetual statute throughout your generations*. A similar thing is said about the next commands concerning the showbread.

Leviticus 24:5-9 Preparing the Table of Showbread

This command is in 5 parts:

1. *You shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake.*



2. *You shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD.*
3. *You shall put pure frankincense on each row.*
4. *Every Sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually.*
5. *It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place.*

[Showbread pictures from www.mishkanministries.org]

This command was given to Moses, but apparently the high priest would usually set it up. (This paragraph supplements Exodus 25:23-30 and 37:10-16.) There were to be 12 quite large loaves of bread. Ryrie says *each loaf contained about four qt (4.5 lit) of flour* (“Ryrie Study Bible,” p. 197). They were probably placed in two rows with the incense placed in bowls on the table beside the cakes. Each Sabbath, when new bread was placed on the table, the old bread was given to the priests to eat, but it must be eaten in the Holy Place.

We also must take time to notice that the lampstand and the showbread commands were *a perpetual statue throughout your generations* (verse 3) and *an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel* (verse 8). So as long as the nation of Israel was on the earth, they were to keep these commands.

Leviticus 24:10-16, 23 Stoning for Blasphemy

This short paragraph, plus chapters 8-10, are the only narrative sections in Leviticus. The son of a mixed marriage was fighting with a pure blooded Israelite. It is not clear why we are told that. It could be because they were fighting about genealogical significance, or it could be to show that even half-breeds were subject to Israel’s laws (verse 16).

Apparently, the blasphemy was overheard or the Israelite reported it. It seems the half-breed used the name of God in a statement of a curse against his opponent. The Hebrew word we translate *blasphemy* is נָקַב (naqab) to *pierce, bore, blaspheme, or appoint*. This seems to be the violation of the third commandment in Exodus 20:7, but the word describing the sin here is not the same. The word in the Ten Commandments means *vein, false or empty*. The word in Leviticus means to pierce a hole (like in a bag or something). What is the same in both is the word שֵׁם (shem) for *name*. Actually, Leviticus just says he blasphemed *the name* although it is clear from verse 16 that it means the name of God.

The people were not clear what to do with him so they *put him in custody*. Israel did not have a prison system, so this was only a means of holding him. It was probably a pit in the ground. Then they brought him to Moses and *the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him”* (24:13-14). Which is what they did (24:23). Ryrie says: *By laying their hands on him, the people transferred to him whatever guilt might have accrued to the community* (*ibid*). Maybe, but the text gives no reason for the laying on of hands. Then God adds the comment: *If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin* (24:15). The point being, there was not an animal sacrifice for that. Therefore, uttering a curse using the name of God resulted in the death penalty.

Leviticus 24:17-22 The Law of Equal Retaliation

The law is best described with the phrase *fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth*. But the law also extended to the property of another. There are three specific examples given here:

1. *If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.*
2. *The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life.*
3. *If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him.*

The section ends with God declaring that this standard applies to everyone, a Gentile stranger or native Israelite.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICIIONS

The Everlasting Nature of These Regulations

We must understand the commands about the golden lamp and the table of showbread were something the Hebrews were to continue throughout their generations (24:3). But today these commands are impossible for them to keep. Because of their disobedience, God removed them from the land and allowed the Romans to destroy the temple in 70 AD. So what should they do? They should accept Jesus as their Messiah and become part of the church because that is what God is doing today (Ephesians 3:3-9). But the rabbis decided God wanted them to establish a bloodless worship system around themselves, their oral traditions, and their synagogues.

Notice that all of God's generational commands are to be seen in light of the age in which they are offered. There is no Jewish Temple today because God is dealing with the church and Jews are set aside during this age (Romans 11:18ff). But Israel is only set aside, not eliminated, from the plan of God (Romans 11:1-3). The Temple and its implements will be reinstated during the Millennial Kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48). So these regulations will also be reinstated in the Millennium. But that, too, will not be eternal. Believing Jews, like all the saints, will eventually be in the New Jerusalem where John reports: *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple* (Revelation 21:22). So the Temple and its implements will eventually be done away, not because of disobedience but because of the eternal plan of God.

Blasphemy Was Not Covered by the Sacrificial System

Notice 24:15 has the comment: *If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin*. So the sin of blasphemy was not covered by the Levitical sacrifice system. That was true of all the laws that carried a penalty instead of a sacrificial command. So, although the sacrifices were a type or example of Christ's death on the cross, they were not to be equated with His death for our sins. Seven hundred years before the death of Christ, the prophet Isaiah predicted a Messiah who would do what the law could not do, pay for **all** our sins. He described the Messiah with these words:

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him And by His scourging we are healed ... the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isaiah 53:5-6).

John Calvin saw the law as moral, civil, and ceremonial. He thought Christ's death ended the ceremonial laws, and we were to still keep the moral and civil laws. But if that were true, then there would be no sacrifice for blasphemy, murder, adultery, and a host of other intentional known sins, which were not covered by the sacrificial system. That's why David prayed in reference to his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah: *For You do not delight in sacrifice otherwise I would give it* (Psalms 51:16).

Justice – The Law of Equal Retaliation

For sins outside of the sacrificial system, the basic rule was an *eye for eye*, and a *tooth for tooth*. That was justice, and justice is an attribute of God. There was no grace or mercy in the Mosaic Law. Actually, although we see God exercising grace, there is no example or statement in the Old Testament where God ever offered grace to the individual. That's probably because Christ had not yet died, satisfying the justice of God, so that grace could be offered to the individual. Because we

relate to God by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), we are not to be involved in the justice of equal retaliation. Today, that is for God and government.

Crime and Punishment

The Mosaic Law had no prison system. You notice here the blasphemer was held in custody only until his punishment could be determined. Prison is a very bad idea because:

1. Prisons are a school for crime. They are a place where small-time criminals meet, form networks with, and learn from, long-term hardened criminals.
2. Prisons are a moral cesspool where an inmate is encouraged to, or forced to, increase his immorality. They rarely make a bad man better. They usually make a bad man worse.
3. They are expensive, thus forcing the taxpayer to pay for the criminal. So the innocent pays for the guilty, rather than the guilty paying the innocent.

Among other things, in a post-modern world, we use prisons today because:

- We do not believe in capital punishment, so we cannot carry out justice.
- We believe the government should take over the family's job of discipline and correction.
- We want to keep dangerous people out of society, not punish them.
- We believe people are basically good, not sinners.
- We believe crime is basically against society, not against some particular person.
- We want to strengthen the role of government, not the responsibility of the individual.