

Session 3:

The Mosaic Law

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Session 3: The Mosaic Law

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Festivals and Holy Days

In the Mosaic Law God gave the Israelites a calendar that was filled with festivals and holy days. The holy day that we are most familiar with is the Sabbath, but there are quite a few others as well. I think it's unfortunate that so many Christians are unfamiliar with most of these festivals. These holy days are not just trivia: they point to Christ's ministry *and* have prophetic significance.

We can find a detailed list of these festivals in Leviticus 23:

Leviticus 23:1: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts."

The chapter goes on to list the various festivals. They are:

- **The Sabbath (1 day):** this occurred on the seventh day of each week; it was a holy day of rest (Lev. 23:1-3). This is the holy day that we are most familiar with.
- **The Passover (1 day):** this occurred on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year. It was to remind Israel that God delivered them from bondage in Egypt (Lev. 23:4-5).
- **The Feast of Unleavened Bread (7 days):** this was a week-long event that started on the day after the Passover. This was to remind God's people of their deliverance from bondage into a new, holy life (Lev. 23:6-8).

- **The Firstfruits (1 day):** this occurred on the day after the Sabbath that followed the Passover (which meant it always took place on a Sunday). It was a demonstration that the first and best of everything belonged to God (Lev. 23:9-14). This began the day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- **The Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) (1 day):** this occurred seven weeks (50 days) after the Festival of Firstfruits. In this holy day a priest would wave two loaves (which had been baked with leaven) before the Lord. (Lev. 23:15-21).
- **The Trumpets (1 day):** this occurred on the first day of the seventh month. This was a day of rest and burnt offerings, and it symbolized new beginnings (Lev. 23:23-25). A gap of 4 months separated Pentecost from Trumpets.
- **The Day of Atonement (1 day):** this occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month. This was a day of rest, in which people cried out to the Lord for forgiveness (Lev. 23:28-32). This is the day when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and made atonement for the sins of the people.
- **The Feast of Tabernacles (Feast of Booths) (7 days):** this was a week-long event that began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. This reminded Israel of the ways God had blessed them in the past (Lev. 33-44).

These festivals give us an amazing overview of God's plan for history. Some people have called these festivals God's prophetic calendar.

Before we begin a detailed look at each holy day, however, there is an important question that we need to answer. When the Church Age began there were some people who wondered if Christians were still bound by the old levitical law. Was the Church supposed to keep all of these festivals?

That question was answered by the apostle Paul in two

different places:

Colossians 2:16: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

Romans 14:5: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.”

The lesson in these verses is clear. In the Old Testament the Israelites were under the Mosaic Law, and therefore they were required to observe these feasts (along with all of the other provisions that were contained within the law). After the death of Jesus, however, the Old Testament was supplanted by the New Testament. We are no longer under the Mosaic Law; instead we are under grace. Christians are not required to observe these festivals. Instead we have the freedom to do as we think best; we can observe them or we can ignore them. The Bible commands Christians to not judge each other concerning this matter. Those who keep them are not better than those who don't (and vice versa).

There is not enough time to explore each of the feasts in detail, so I will only cover them briefly. I hope this will give you a better understanding of the marvelous calendar that God gave to the Israelites.

The Sabbath

The first holy day that is mentioned in Leviticus 23 is the Sabbath. It was to be held on the seventh day of every week:

Leviticus 23:3: “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.”

The Lord set apart the seventh day of the week (which is our Saturday) to be a holy day of rest. No work was allowed to be done on the Sabbath *on pain of death*. In Numbers 15:32-36 we are told that a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. When he was brought to the Lord for sentencing God commanded that he be stoned to death. This was done in obedience to this commandment:

Exodus 30:14: “Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.”

Twice in two verses the Lord commanded that anyone who violated the Sabbath was to be put to death. The Lord did not accept violations of the Sabbath (although as Christ pointed out, showing love and kindness was not a violation), and God often used His prophets to rebuke Israel for the many ways they

violated this command.

The Lord gave several reasons for this holy day. First, when the Lord created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, He made the seventh day holy:

Exodus 20:11: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

We are also told that the seventh day of the week was set aside so that mankind might be refreshed from their labors:

Exodus 23:12: “Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.”

Finally, the Sabbath was set aside to remind the nation of Israel of their special relationship with God:

Exodus 23:13: “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.”

Besides the Sabbath day, the Lord also appointed Sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee. Every seventh year was to be a year of rest. In that year the Israelites were not allowed to sow crops; instead the land was to lie dormant in order to give it a chance to rest. The Lord promised to provide an abundant harvest on the year before the Sabbath year so that famine would not ensue. Likewise, every fiftieth year was the Year of Jubilee; the land was also to lie rest on that year, and all debts were canceled. Since the

Year of Jubilee always followed a Sabbath year, the Lord promised to provide an abundant harvest before these two years of rest.

The Sabbath is one of the festivals that have not yet been fulfilled. We know this because the book of Hebrews expounds upon it:

Hebrews 4:4: “For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

For now, in this life, we labor and work for God. A day is coming, though, when we will finally cease from our labors and enter into God's rest. The people of God have struggled for a long time, but one day Christ will return for us. When that day comes the Church will finally rest from its labors. Our Sabbath day of rest is approaching; every day it draws nearer.

As a side-note, it's worth noting that God clearly states that He created the world in *six days*. The word that is translated “day” in Exodus 20 is exactly the same word that is used in Genesis 1. God could not have made it any plainer that everything was created in six ordinary days – after all, the Lord commanded the Israelites to rest on the seventh day just as He did! Those who would claim that the days lasted millions of years turn Exodus 20:11 into nonsense. Are people supposed to work for untold millions of years and then rest for millions of years? If God had wanted to say that the world came into being through millions of years of evolution He certainly could have done so – but He did not.

The Passover

The second holy day that is on the calendar is the Passover. It was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year:

Leviticus 23:5: “In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover.”

The festival began in the evening. Jewish days always began in the evening and then continued until the next afternoon. This followed the pattern that God established in Genesis 1: a day consisted of an evening and a morning.

The first time that Israel celebrated the Passover was when they were still in bondage in Egypt:

Exodus 12:2: “And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to

you.

3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house: ...

5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:

6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance [internal organs] thereof.

10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.”

The Passover was to be celebrated at the beginning of every Jewish year, and it served as a reminder of Israel's great deliverance from Egypt. The last plague that God sent to Egypt was the angel of death, who was sent to kill the firstborn of every living creature. In order to be saved from the angel of death the Jews had to be covered by the blood of a perfect lamb. All of the firstborn who were not protected by the blood were killed by the death angel. This is a striking parallel to Christ, who was called “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The Lord is even called “Christ our passover” in 1 Corinthians 5:7, which makes the parallel even clearer.

The Jews celebrated the first passover by killing the perfect male lamb in the evening. After they painted the doorposts of their house with blood, they were to roast the lamb (with its internal organs) with fire, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Nothing was allowed to remain until the next morning; if there were any leftovers they had to be burned.

The Passover looked forward to the coming Lamb of God – the Messiah who would die for our sins. As you might suspect, Jesus was actually crucified *on the day of the Passover*. The Passover festival was fulfilled by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross; He fulfilled it by personally becoming the sacrificial Lamb.

The blood of Christ is the only thing that can deliver us from death. We must be washed in His blood:

John 6:53: “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise Him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in Him.

57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so He that eateth me, even He shall live by me.

58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.”

No outsiders were allowed to eat of the Passover; only those who were born into the family (or purchased) could eat it.

Likewise, no one who is not in the family of God can partake of Christ.

I think this quote puts it well:

“The firstborn Jews in Egypt weren't saved from death by admiring the lamb, caring for the lamb, or loving the lamb. The lamb had to be slain, and the blood applied to the doorpost of each Jewish house. We aren't saved by Christ the Example or Christ the Teacher. We're saved by Christ the Substitute, who gave His life in our stead on the cross at the same hour the Passover lambs were being slain at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.”
(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Holy*, pg. 103-104)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day event that began the day after Passover. It is explained in this passage:

Leviticus 23:6-8: “And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.

7 In the first day ye shall have a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.”

This was celebrated when the Israelites were still in Egypt:

Exodus 12:15: “Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

16 And in the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

17 And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever.

18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

19 Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.

20 Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.”

The feast could be summed up as follows:

- The feast lasted 7 days, during which they were to eat unleavened bread each day.
- The first and last day of the feast were holy days, and no

work could be done on them.

- The Israelites were to completely remove all leaven (which was symbolic of sin) from their homes.
- No one could eat anything with leaven in it during the feast. The punishment for breaking this was severe.
- “Offerings made by fire” were to be made during those seven days.
- The Israelites were to observe it as a reminder of the day the Lord delivered them from Egypt.

There are two important points that we need to understand in order to make sense of this feast. First of all, leaven is symbolic of sin. Second, Jesus referred to Himself as the Bread of Life:

John 6:33: "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."

John 6:50: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Since Jesus was without sin, and since Jesus is the Bread of Life, that makes Him *unleavened bread*. In this festival God commanded Israel to partake of unleavened bread – and Jesus commands us to partake of Him. This festival began the day after after the Passover, which means it took place the day after the lamb had been sacrificed. Just as Christ fulfilled the Passover by becoming the sacrificial lamb, Christ fulfilled this festival by *being* the unleavened bread. God commands us to partake of Him

and remove the sin (which is what leaven is symbolic of) from our lives.

This is how the apostle Paul put it:

1 Corinthians 5:6: “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

The Festival of Firstfruits

The Festival of the Firstfruits fell on the day after the Sabbath that followed the Passover. Since the Sabbath fell on a Saturday, that meant that this festival would always occur on a Sunday. The festival is described in this passage:

Leviticus 23:9: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:

11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

12 And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the

sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the Lord.

13 And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the Lord for a sweet savor: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of a hin.

14 And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

In this festival the Jews were to bring a portion of the firstfruits of their crops to the Lord as an offering. The priest would take this portion and wave it before the Lord. They would then offer a male lamb, without blemish, as a burnt offering. The offering was also to be accompanied by a meat offering and a drink offering. (Note that these offerings were offerings of *dedication*, not offerings for sin.)

The Israelites were not allowed to eat “bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears” until they brought the firstfruits and offered it to the Lord. The Lord claimed the firstfruits of their crops as His own, and this was day they were required to offer it. Although the entire creation belongs to God, the Lord only required the firstfruits and left the rest to the nation of Israel. The firstfruits were offered on behalf of the entire harvest.

The key to understanding this festival is to realize that Christ rose from the dead on the very day that this festival was being celebrated. That was not a coincidence. The Bible identifies Christ as the **firstfruit of the dead**:

1 Corinthians 15:20: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came

also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

This festival looked forward to the resurrection. Although there were other people in the Bible who were raised from the dead, they were not raised incorruptible and immortal and they eventually died again. Christ's resurrection, however, was different: He was raised in a new and more glorious body. Since Jesus was the first person to be resurrected, He was the firstfruits. So far He is the only person who has been resurrected, but one day the rest of the harvest will follow. Verse 23 tells us that when Christ returns the righteous dead will be resurrected and the living will be translated.

Christ fulfilled the Passover by becoming the sacrificial lamb, and He fulfilled the Festival of Unleavened Bread by becoming the Bread of Life. Christ fulfilled this festival by raising from the dead and becoming the firstfruits of the dead.

Pentecost

The festival of Pentecost (which was also known as the Feast of Weeks) was a one-day holy day that took place 50 days after the Festival of Firstfruits. It is described in these verses:

Leviticus 23:15: "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:

16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh

sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.

17 Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.

18 And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the Lord, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savor unto the Lord.

19 Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings.

20 And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.

21 And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be a holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.”

As the passage explains, the festival of Pentecost took place fifty days after the festival of firstfruits. It was a one-day event, and no work could be done on the day of Pentecost. The event involved a number of different sacrifices:

- A series of burnt offerings that consisted of seven lambs, one young bullock, and two rams. Burnt offerings were offerings of dedication.
- A goat as a sin offering. Sin offerings were offerings of

reconciliation for sin against God.

- Two lambs for peace offerings. Peace offerings dealt with thanksgiving and fellowship with God.

At the heart of this festival were the two wave loaves. These loaves were made of fine flour and were baked with yeast. This is very unusual, as the other festivals (such as Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) forbade the use of yeast. In the Scriptures yeast always represents sin, and yet yeast was baked into these two loaves. The priest was to take these two loaves and wave them before the Lord.

The reason we are so familiar with the word Pentecost is because that is the day the Church was born:

Acts 2:1: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

On that day the Holy Spirit came and united the Jews and the Gentiles (two very different groups) into one body. There was no longer Jew or Gentile, for all were one in Christ. The two loaves had been joined into one.

These loaves, however, have not yet been made perfect. Just as there was leaven in the loaves, so there is sin in the Church. When the Lord returns He will make us immortal and incorruptible, but that day has not yet come. For now we still have to deal with the sin that works throughout the body.

One of the key aspects of leaven is that it makes bread rise. Leaven doesn't actually make more bread, though; it just makes the bread appear to be larger than it really is. Likewise, sin has made the Church appear much larger than it really is. There are many people in our midst who claim to be Christians but are not. These people will be separated out when the Lord returns and will be left behind.

One other thing: right after this festival is described there are two verses that seem very out of place:

Leviticus 23:22: “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God.”

Why was this commandment put right in the middle of a discussion of festivals and holy days? Well, it's interesting to note that because of this commandment, Ruth was able to find food to feed herself and her mother-in-law. This led to her relationship with Boaz, who was an ancestor of King David, who was an ancestor of Jesus Christ – the one who made all of these festivals possible.

As we have seen, Christ fulfilled the Passover by becoming the sacrificial lamb. He fulfilled the Festival of Unleavened Bread by becoming the Bread of Life. He fulfilled the Festival of Firstfruits by rising from the dead. The Holy Spirit fulfilled Pentecost by joining both Jew and Gentile into the body of Christ. All of these festivals take place in the spring, and all of them have been fulfilled.

There are still three festivals left. All of them occur in the fall, and all of them remain unfulfilled. They are prophetic, and look forward to events that have not yet occurred.

The Festival of Trumpets

After Pentecost there is a gap of four months before the next festival – but the three remaining festivals all occur within 15 days. The next holy day is the Festival of Trumpets, which was held on the first day of the seventh month. It is described in this passage:

Leviticus 23:23: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
24 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.
25 Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.”

This was a one-day festival, and no work was allowed on that day. It was a day of rest and sacrifices – a day that was signified by the blowing of trumpets.

The sacrifices for this festival are described in this passage:

Numbers 29:1: “And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: **it is a day of blowing the trumpets** unto you.
2 And ye shall offer a burnt offering for a sweet savor unto the Lord; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without blemish:

3 And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram,
4 And one tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:
5 And one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you:"

As was mentioned before, burnt offerings and meat offerings were offerings of dedication and *commitment*, not offerings for sin. They were a way of saying "I am fully dedicating my life to serving God."

It is very important to note that this day was signified by blowing trumpets. There were three times when priests were allowed to blow trumpets, and they are listed in Numbers 10:1-10. Priests could blow their trumpets to call the people together, to announce war, or to announce special times (such as the new moon). This festival falls into the third category.

The Festival of Trumpets was held on the first day of the seventh month, and it ushered in the new civil year ("Rosh Hashanah"). Since it started the new civil year, it marked a new beginning for the Israelites. As Christians we are also waiting for a new beginning, which will be marked by the blowing of a trumpet:

1 Corinthians 15:51: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruption shall have put on

incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

As we can see, the fulfillment of this festival is still in the future. One day the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and we will begin a new existence. This festival looks forward to the Rapture, and one day Christ will fulfill it by returning for us.

There are some people who have speculated that since the other festivals were fulfilled on the day of that festival, the Festival of Trumpets will likewise be fulfilled on Rosh Hashanah. Unfortunately, the Scriptures do not support this. The reason this festival takes place on the first day of the Jewish civil year is to commemorate the fact that a new year has begun; it is not pointing to a specific date in history. The Rapture can occur on any day and at any time; it is not limited to occurring on just one day of the year. Whenever it happens it will mark the beginning of a new life for us – just as Rosh Hashanah marked the beginning of a new civil year for Israel.

The Day of Atonement

This feast was a one-day event that occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month (which is nine days after the Festival of Trumpets). It is explained in this passage:

Leviticus 23:27: “Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.

28 And ye shall do no work in that same day: for

it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the Lord your God.

29 For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

30 And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.

31 Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

32 It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.”

The day of atonement is a day that is set aside for fasting, praying, and confessing the sin of the people. On that day the congregation was to do no work; their entire focus was to be on “afflicting your souls” and crying out to God for forgiveness. No work was allowed on that day (perhaps because one's works cannot bring atonement). On this day the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies in the Temple and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

I believe that this festival has yet to be fulfilled, and that it speaks of the day when the Jews will finally accept Jesus as their Messiah. This is spoken of in the book of Zechariah:

Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon.”

At the end of the Tribulation the Jews will realize that they have rejected their Messiah and will turn to God with great sorrow and repentance. At that point all Israel will be saved (which is what Paul prophesied in Romans 11).

The Feast of Tabernacles

This feast, also known as the “Feast of Booths”, occurred on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (which is five days after the Day of Atonement). This festival was a week-long event that dealt not with affliction but with joy:

Leviticus 23:34: “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord.

35 On the first day shall be a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. ...

39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.

41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:

43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

In this feast the Israelites were to take branches from trees, build booths (or tents), and live in them for seven days. The first and last of these days were considered Sabbaths. (In the Jewish calendar there were occasionally times when a day was designated as a “Sabbath”, even though it was not actually the seventh day of the week.) During this time the Israelites were to dwell in the booths, rejoice in the Lord, and remember the time when their ancestors dwelt in tents after the Lord delivered them from Egypt. While the focus of the Day of Atonement was on mourning and repentance, the focus of the Feast of Tabernacles was on rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord. This holy day was something like our Thanksgiving, only it lasted for an entire week.

There were a great many sacrifices involved with this festival; a list can be found in Numbers 29. By the time the week was over 199 animals were sacrificed.

What I find especially interesting is that during the Millennial Kingdom the surviving Gentile nations will be required to go to Jerusalem and keep this festival:

Zechariah 14:16: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.”

Even during the Millennium the Lord still wants people to look back and remember the great things that God has done.

According to my research, scholars believe that this festival looks forward to the time when Jesus will return and live with His people once again, and reign over the world. The Bible tells us that it will be a time of great peace and great rejoicing. When prophesying about the coming Millennium, the prophet Isaiah wrote this:

Isaiah 65:18: “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.”

People will indeed rejoice before the Lord – not for seven days, but for a thousand years.

As you can see, there are some festivals that have been fulfilled and there are some that have not. The Passover was fulfilled when Jesus became our sacrificial Lamb and died on the cross. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled when Jesus led a sinless life and became the Bread of Life for us. The Festival of Firstfruits was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead and became the firstfruits of the resurrection. Pentecost was

fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came and united the Jews and the Gentiles into one body, the Church.

There remain four unfulfilled festivals. We have not yet entered into our Sabbath rest. Jesus has not yet returned for us at the sound of the trumpet. The Jews have not yet repented of rejecting the Messiah and mourned for their sins. Finally, the age of the Millennial Kingdom has not yet come. The Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Festival of Booths are still in the future – but one day they will be fulfilled. One might say that they are the next events on God's calendar.

The Levitical System

In the Old Testament the nation of Israel interacted with God through the levitical priesthood. This system lasted until the death of Christ, with both fulfilled and ended that system. (I realize that the Jews continued to offer sacrifices until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but this was done in disobedience and unbelief; Christ's death put an end to the old system and instituted a new one.)

Since the levitical system does not apply to our lives today, why should it be studied? I think there are several key reasons:

- The levitical system was given to help the Israelites understand salvation. Hebrews 10:1 calls it an “image”. It is a beautiful picture of mankind's greatest problem and God's amazing solution. Understanding the levitical system helps us understand our own sinfulness and God's unimaginable holiness.
- When the Old Testament was written, Israel lived under the levitical system. There are some events in the Bible that are difficult to understand unless we know the context in which they took place.
- The New Testament refers extensively to the levitical system to help explain salvation. These references are lost on us if we don't understand what it is referring to.

It is impossible to cover the levitical system in any great detail in a single lesson, so I am just going to go over the highlights. This won't tell you everything that there is to know, but it will get you started.

Blood Atonement

The Bible tells us that the forgiveness of sins requires the shedding of blood:

Hebrews 9:22: “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”

You see, God cannot overlook sin and sweep it under the rug. In order for sin to be forgiven *it has to be paid for*. God is just, and justice demands payment. Since the wages of sin is death, that means that in order for us to be forgiven, something has to die.

In the Mosaic Law God commanded that animals be sacrificed as payment for sins. The blood of animals would be used to make atonement. The reason that animals were used is because sins could only be paid for with the blood of an innocent party:

Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”

However, sacrificing animals was not the final answer, nor was it ever intended to be. The sacrificial system looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. The blood of animals was not able to pay for the sins of man:

Hebrews 10:4: “For it is not possible that the

blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

The only way our sins could be paid for was through the blood of a man – an innocent man who had never sinned. That is why Jesus came, lived a sinless life, and died. He had to be sinless, because if He had sinned then He would be dying for His own sins, not for ours. The only way He could die in our place was if He had no sins of His own to die for. Since Jesus was sinless, He could make atonement for us with His own blood:

Hebrews 9:12: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

The Levitical system pointed to Christ. The sacrifice of lambs looked forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The system was not an end of itself; it was a shadow of things to come.

Incidentally, this is also why Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved. He is the only offering that can pay for our sins, and our sins *must* be paid for in order for us to be accepted by God. It is therefore impossible to be saved apart from Jesus.

The Levites

In the Old Testament the Lord took the tribe of Levi and dedicated them to the priesthood and the service of the tabernacle. The rest of the Israelites were not allowed to serve in the tabernacle on pain of death:

Numbers 18:22: “Neither must the children of

Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die.

23 But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.”

The nation of Israel could not interact directly with God; instead they went through the Levites. The Levites acted as an intermediary between God and Israel. The reason this was needed was because God was holy and Israel was not. The Israelites were simply too unclean to approach God. The only way they could interact with God was if someone who was trained and set apart did it on their behalf. That was the role that the Levites played – they were set apart and trained for the service of God.

Approaching God was not something to be taken lightly. God was so holy that sinful man could not survive in His presence. Notice the strict instructions that God gave to the Israelites when they approached Mount Sinai:

Exodus 19:10: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, 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, to touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall surely be put to death:

13 There shall not a 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.

...

And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.

20 And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.

21 And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.

22 And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them.”

The Lord was so holy that if the people had merely gazed upon the Lord they would have died! Even just *touching* the mountain on which the Lord had come down was punishable by death. The Levites acted as a protective barrier. They knew how to cleanse themselves, how to properly offer sacrifices, and how to behave. Most importantly, though, they were directly appointed by God to be the only people who were allowed to approach Him. The priests offered sacrifices on behalf of the people, and once a year the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people.

As was said earlier, the entire tribe of Levi was set aside to serve God. They were responsible for maintaining the tabernacle (and later the Temple) and offering sacrifices:

Numbers 3:6: “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

7 And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

8 And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.

9 And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.

10 And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on the priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.”

Since God set them apart to serve Him, they were not given any inheritance in the land of Canaan. Each tribe was given their own plot of land, but the Levites were not. This is because of their unique role. Since they had no land of their own (although God did set aside some cities for them), they were to be supported by the tithe:

Numbers 18:20: “And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

21 And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

22 Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die.

23 But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.

24 But the tithes of the children of Israel, which

they offer as a heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance."

As verse 24 explains, the Levites were given a tithe instead of a portion of land. The Israelites gave the Levites a tenth of their produce and livestock, which the Levites needed in order to support themselves. The Levites, in turn, gave a tenth of this tithe to the priests:

Numbers 19:26: "Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up a heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe.

27 And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fullness of the winepress.

28 Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the Lord of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the Lord's heave offering to Aaron the priest."

The priests did not give a tithe to anyone.

It should be noted that the tithe consisted of livestock and produce; it was not a monetary amount. Although there was a temple tax that was a monetary amount, that tax was separate from the tithe. God required that all Israelites pay the tithe, and when it was not paid the Lord became quite angry:

Malachi 3:8: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed

thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Whenever Israel failed to pay the tithe they made it impossible for the Levites to continue to work in the tabernacle. This created a serious problem because the only people who could offer sacrifices were the priests. If the priests could not do their jobs then that meant no one could approach God. It also meant that there was no one offering sacrifices for forgiveness or atoning for the sins of the people. If the priests were gone then Israel's access to God was also gone. Tithing was a very serious matter.

Although the entire tribe of Levi served God in some capacity, not everyone was charged with the same task. The role that you played depended on your lineage. Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. These men created three different lines, and each line had their own duties. The book of Numbers outlines these duties in great detail. The sons of **Gershon** were charged with maintaining the curtains of the tabernacle:

Numbers 3:24: “And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,

26 And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the alter round about, and

the cords of it for all the service thereof.”

The sons of **Kohath** were charged with taking care of the items within the tabernacle itself:

Numbers 3:31: “And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.”

As you can see, this included the Ark of the Covenant, the altars, and the various sacrificial vessels.

The sons of **Merari** were charged with the physical structure of the tabernacle:

Numbers 3:36: “And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto, 37 And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.”

Notice that *none* of these groups were charged with performing sacrifices. While the entire tribe of Levi was dedicated to serving in the tabernacle, the only people who could offer sacrifices were the priests. In order to be a priest you had to be a descendent of Aaron:

Numbers 3:10: “And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.”

No one else was allowed to offer sacrifices. As you can

see, all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

Besides being a descendent of Aaron, the priests also had to be physically perfect. If they had any physical defect they were not allowed to be a priest:

Leviticus 21:17: “Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God.

18 For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous,

19 Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded,

20 Or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken;

21 No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God.”

They also had to be between 25 and 50 years old:

Numbers 8:23: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

24 This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation:

25 And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more:

26 But shall minister with their brethren in the

tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge.”

God also put restrictions on who they could marry. Priests were not allowed to marry anyone who was a widow or divorced, and they were required to marry a fellow Levite:

Leviticus 21:13: “And he shall take a wife in her virginity.

14 A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.”

Being a priest was a very honorable and important thing – but it was also very dangerous. You had to do everything right all of the time. If you stepped out of line while performing your duties then the Lord would strike you dead:

Leviticus 10:1: “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.

2 And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

3 Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.”

You were not allowed to improvise, change things, or do things your way. You had to do things God's way all of the time *or you died*.

Some people look at this and come to the conclusion that God was very harsh back then, but now He's changed and is more

lenient. That is not the case. You see, God never changes. The God who was so specific and demanding in the Old Testament is the very same God who rules today. God demanded complete and utter holiness in the Old Testament and God still demands that in the New Testament. He demanded complete perfection before and He still demands it now. The difference is that in the Old Testament the nation of Israel tried to live up to that standard, and they failed miserably. The truth is that no one can live up to that standard. It is impossible – and that is the whole point. The New Testament tells us that the reason God gave the Law was to show mankind that we cannot keep it. The Law was a schoolmaster to point us to Christ, the One who kept the law on our behalf.

The Law proves that we cannot come to God in our own righteousness; we are just not good enough. Thanks to Christ, however, we don't have to try to do the impossible. Instead, we now approach God with the imputed righteousness of Christ. When we are saved God credits Christ's righteousness to our account. Jesus lived and died a perfect life, and when God looks at us that is what He sees. Instead of seeing us for who we are, God sees us dressed in Christ's perfect righteousness and holiness. That makes all the difference. God still requires complete and utter perfection and holiness – but Christ accomplished that for us.

Unfortunately, there are many people who are not interested in obtaining righteousness from God. Instead they want to approach God on their own terms and try to measure up by living what they consider to be good lives. However, that approach is not going to work. God made it absolutely clear that He can only be approached His way, on His terms. The levitical system in the Old Testament tells us that our own attempts at holiness fall far short of what God requires. Christ's righteousness is the only way we will ever be able to stand before God. Nothing else will do.

When Christ came He put an end to the system of Levites. We no longer need Levites and priests to stand between us and

God. Instead we have a different mediator – Christ Himself:

1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”

We can now boldly approach the throne of grace because Christ has paid the way for us. We no longer need to go to Levites in order to seek forgiveness; instead we go to Christ.

Today we no longer have Levites; instead we have pastors. Pastors are shepherds and evangelists who teach us the Word and preach the gospel. We don't go to them for forgiveness and they don't offer sacrifices on our behalf. They don't need to, because Christ has finished that work. Their job is to point us to Christ.

The Temple

When the Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai the Lord gave Moses more than just the Ten Commandments. Over a period of 40 days the Lord gave Moses hundreds of commandments. He also gave Moses the plans for the tabernacle. The tabernacle was not just a building; it was far more than that. In today's world we have churches where the people of God meet to serve and worship Him. However, God doesn't actually live in the church. The church is just a building where God's people meet.

However, God actually *did* live in the tabernacle. It was literally God's house:

Exodus 25:8: “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.”

Today God dwells within us, but back then the gift of the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. (The Holy Spirit did exist but He was only with people on rare occasions. He was not with all believers all of the time, the way He is now.) In the Old Testament God actually had a street address. If you wanted to approach God you went to the Temple, because that's the place God had chosen. The sacrifices were made at the Temple. Offerings were given at the Temple. If the king wanted to ask God a question he had to go to the Temple. That was literally where God lived – He manifested His glory there.

The tabernacle was paid for by freewill offerings from the people. God told the people what items were needed for the tabernacle's construction, and people willingly gave everything that was required.

The instructions that God gave for building the tabernacle were incredibly exact. The Lord specified every detail, right down to the curtains:

Exodus 26:1: “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.

2 The length of one curtain shall be eight and twenty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and every one of the curtains shall have one measure. . .”

These directions go on for quite some time. In the following sections we will take a look at some of the key portions of the tabernacle.

One thing to keep in mind, though, is that Christ's death changed everything. Temples and churches are two very different

things. God no longer dwells in a building; instead His Spirit dwells inside us. The Temple existed so that men might go to God for things such as forgiveness (offering sacrifices) and wisdom (inquiring of God). God did not live *within* His people; instead He lived *among* them. Today, though, we can access God directly. The Bible commands us to go directly to Him for forgiveness and to pray directly to Him for wisdom. We no longer need a Temple, for our bodies *are* temples (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the heart of the tabernacle, in the room known as the Holy of Holies. The only person who was allowed to enter that room was the High Priest, and he could only enter it once a year on the Day of Atonement. At that time he would make atonement for the people by entering the Holy of Holies and sprinkling blood on the mercy seat. The Ark was where God physically manifested His glory. When the High Priest entered the room he could actually see the glory of God (something theologians refer to as the Shekinah Glory).

God gave very precise instructions for building the **Ark of the Covenant**. It was 3.75 feet long and 2.25 feet high. The ark was made of wood and covered in pure gold:

Exodus 25:10: “And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

11 And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about.”

The Ark had some wooden poles that were permanently

attached to it:

Exodus 25:12: “And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it.

13 And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold.

14 And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them.

15 The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it.”

The Ark was to be transported by these wooden staves. Priests would carry the ark by lifting the wooden poles onto their shoulders. The Ark could never be touched; anyone who dared to touch it was instantly killed. There was one time when Israel tried to transport the Ark by a cart instead of by the staves. When Uzza reached out to steady the Ark, God instantly killed him:

I Chronicles 13:9: “And when they came unto the threshingfloor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled.

10 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God.”

The mercy seat was the top portion of the Ark. If you have ever seen a picture of the Ark, it is the part that has the angels on it. This is how God described it:

Exodus 25:17: “And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the

breadth thereof.

18 And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat.

19 And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof.

20 And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.

21 And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.”

As was said earlier, God physically manifested His glory at the mercy seat:

Exodus 25:22: “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.”

Leviticus 16:2: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.”

When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement, he was actually coming directly into contact with the

glory of God. (Imagine being able to enter the Temple and physically see the glory of God!)

God commanded that the Ten Commandments be placed inside the Ark:

Exodus 25:21: “. . . in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.”

Later, God commanded that Aaron's rod be placed in the Ark (Numbers 17:10), along with a jar of manna (Exodus 16:32-33). Ultimately, though, those two items were lost, and all that remained were the tablets (2 Chronicles 5:10).

There has been a lot of speculation about where the Ark of the Covenant is currently located. Interestingly, while the Ark was in Solomon's Temple, it was not in the temple that existed during Christ's day. There are a lot of theories about where the Ark might be, but I don't think you'll find it on Earth. The book of Revelation tells us that it is in Heaven:

Revelation 11:19: “And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.”

Today we have no need for the Ark because Jesus – our High Priest – has already made atonement for us. As Hebrews 9:12 said, Jesus entered once into the holy place and made atonement for us with His own blood. He will never have to do that again; that work is done. As Jesus said on the cross, it is finished.

The Holy Place

As was said before, the Ark of the Covenant was in the heart of the tabernacle in a place called the Holy of Holies. The only person who was allowed to enter this small room was the High Priest, and he could only enter it once a year on the Day of Atonement. The reason he entered this room was to make atonement for the sins of Israel.

The Holy of Holies was about 15 feet wide and 15 feet long. It was separated from the holy place by a veil. It contained no artificial light, for none was needed; it was literally lit by the glory of God.

Beyond the Holy of Holies, separated by a veil, was the Holy Place. This room was 45 feet long and 15 feet wide. The priests were allowed to enter this room, but the Levites and the common people were not. Everything in this room was golden. This is where the golden lampstand, the golden shewbread table, and the golden altar of incense was located. Although the priests worked in this area, there were no chairs; the priests were not allowed to sit down. This is because their work was never completed. When Christ atoned for our sins, however, He sat down at the right hand of God – indicating that His work was finished (Hebrew 10:11-12).

The **golden lampstand** is what lit the Holy Place where the priests worked. It was hammered from one massive piece of gold and weighed about 75 pounds. (Today this lampstand is known as the menorah, and is a famous Jewish symbol.) These are the specifications that God gave for it:

Exodus 25:31: “And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same.

32 And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side:

33 Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick.

34 And in the candlesticks shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers.

35 And there shall be a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick.

36 Their knops and their branches shall be of the same: all it shall be one beaten work of pure gold.

37 And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it.

38 And the tongs thereof, and the snuffdishes thereof, shall be of pure gold.

39 Of a talent of pure gold shall he make it, with all these vessels.

40 And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.”

The lampstand had seven lamps, which burned pure olive oil:

Exodus 27:20: “And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to

burn always.”

The lampstand was to be continually lit.

The **shewbread table** was inside the Holy Place and was made of wood overlain in gold. It was 3 feet long, 1.5 feet wide, and 2.25 feet high. It had four legs and was carried by two golden poles that were inserted into gold rings. These are the specifications for it:

Exodus 25:23: “Thou shalt also make a table of shittim wood: two cubits shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

24 And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, and make thereto a crown of gold round about.

25 And thou shalt make unto it a border of an hand breadth round about, and thou shalt make a golden crown to the border thereof round about.

26 And thou shalt make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings in the four corners that are on the four feet thereof.

27 Over against the border shall the rings be for places of the staves to bear the table.

28 And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be borne with them.

29 And thou shalt make the dishes thereof, and spoons thereof, and covers thereof, and bowls thereof, to cover withal: of pure gold shalt thou make them.

30 And thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me always.”

As you can see, the table had a number of utensils on it:

there were dishes, spoons (for sprinkling incense), pitchers (for liquid offerings), and bowls (which contained the incense). The purpose of this table was to hold the 12 loaves of shewbread. Each loaf symbolized one of the tribes of Israel. The loaves were made from fine flour:

Leviticus 24:5: “And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake.

6 And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the Lord.”

The loaves were not there for decoration. Every Sabbath day new loaves were provided, and the priests were commanded to eat these holy loaves:

Leviticus 24:8: “Every sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant.

9 And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the Lord made by fire by a perpetual statute.”

The loaves were not simply food; they were a holy offering – and like some of the other offerings, they were to be eaten by the priests.

The **golden altar** was also kept in the Holy Place. It was made of wood overlain in gold, and it was three feet tall and 1.5 feet square. The priests used it to offer incense:

Exodus 30:1: “And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it.

2 A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same.

3 And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about.”

Like the Ark and the table of shewbread, the altar was carried by poles that were inserted through gold rings:

Exodus 30:4: “And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal.

5 And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold.”

The priests offered incense upon it every morning and every evening:

Exodus 30:7: “And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.

8 And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.

9 Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.”

The commandment in verse 9 is very important. Two of Aaron's sons once offered strange incense, and the Lord killed them for it. The priests were not allowed to just offer anything

that they wanted. No burnt offerings, meat offerings, or drink offerings could be offered on the altar of incense; only incense was allowed. On top of that, the priests were not allowed to offer just any kind of incense. Only a special type could be used:

Exodus 30:34: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight:

35 And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy:

36 And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy.

37 And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord.

38 Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.”

As you can see, no one else was allowed to make this type of incense and use it for their own purposes. It was strictly reserved for the tabernacle.

The Outer Court

Outside of the tabernacle, surrounding it, was the outer court. This is where the bronze altar was located. The courtyard was 150 feet by 75 feet; it was situated east to west, with the

entrance facing east. The common people (but not Gentiles) were allowed to enter this area.

The **bronze altar** was located in this court and is where sacrifices were offered. It was 7.5 feet square and 4.25 feet high. The altar was made of wood and overlain with brass:

Exodus 27:1: “And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits.

2 And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass.

3 And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass.

4 And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof.

5 And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar.”

When an animal was sacrificed on this altar, the priests would catch the blood in a basin and pour it out at the foot of the altar. This would make atonement for the sin, and the sinner would go home forgiven – but as soon as they sinned again they would have to come and make another sacrifice. Since the people constantly sinned, that meant that sacrifices had to be continually offered.

Once a year (on the Day of Atonement) a sacrifice was made for the sins of the High Priest. After his sins were atoned for he would go into the Holy of Holies and make atonement for the sins of the people.

One of the magnificent things about the sacrifice of Christ

is that His one sacrifice completed the atonement for all of our sins. No other sacrifice will ever be needed. Israel had to continually offer sacrifices for their sins, but Christ offered Himself once and finished the task (Hebrews 7:27).

As a side-note, verse 2 speaks of the horns of the altar. In the Bible horns are symbolic of power. When animals were sacrificed on the altar they were tied to those horns. The horns did serve another purpose, however. If someone was falsely accused of murder they could take refuge by fleeing to the tabernacle and grabbing the horns of the altar:

1 Kings 1:50: “And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.”

If he was innocent then God commanded that he be spared, but if he was guilty then he was to be taken away and killed.

The Urim and the Thummim

In the Old Testament the Lord gave His people a unique way to communicate with Him. The High Priest was given something that was called the Urim and the Thummim:

Exodus 28:30: “And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.”

The Urim and the Thummim apparently went into the High Priest's breastplate. No one knows exactly what they were or how they worked. All we know is that they were used to inquire of God:

1 Samuel 27:6: “And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”

Ezra 2:63: “And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.”

As you might imagine, this ability to ask God questions and get back direct answers was very useful, and throughout the Bible various kings used it. However, this form of communication with God only appears in the Old Testament. Today the Urim and the Thummim are gone, and God has replaced it with something else: the Bible. The Scriptures contain everything that we need:

2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

We no longer need to go through a priest in order to discover God's will. The apostle Paul tells us that the Bible contains enough information to furnish us unto *all* good works. In other words, it contains *everything* that we need to know in order to serve God during this part of history. We do not need any additional divine revelation; the Bible is enough.

There is a great deal more that can be said about the levitical system, but since time is short I will bring this paper to a close. If you would like to learn more about the levitical system then take a look at the book of Hebrews. That book offers an amazing look at how the sacrificial system pointed to Christ, who both fulfilled and ended it.

The Sacrificial System

The sacrificial system was a key component of the Mosaic Law. Entire chapters of the Bible are dedicated to the regulations that surround sacrifices, and they played a key role in the day-to-day life of ancient Israel. Today, however, most Christians know almost nothing about the sacrificial system. Since we no longer need to sacrifice lambs and goats in our quest for holiness, we have come to ignore this entire facet of the Bible.

However, ignoring the sacrificial system creates its own set of problems. Some parts of the Old Testament are very difficult to understand without a good working knowledge of sacrifices. People usually assume that all sacrifices were the same, but that is not the case. There were actually different types of sacrifices, and they accomplished different things. Once you understand the purpose of each type of sacrifice it will be easier to understand what the Bible is saying. In fact, entire passages will take on new meaning. It is vital for Christians to understand this system – and the more we understand it, the better we will understand the sacrifice that Christ made for us.

Instead of going into great detail about every single sacrifice that is mentioned in the Bible, I'm going to give a high-level overview of the six different types of sacrifices. Of these six types, only two of them dealt with sin and forgiveness – but all six dealt with one's relationship with God.

These six types fall into three major categories:

Offerings of commitment: burnt offering, meat offering, drink offering.

Offerings of communion: peace offering.

Offerings of cleansing: sin offering, guilt offering.

Commitment Offerings

One of the three basic categories of offerings are the commitment offerings. These offerings were focused on expressing one's commitment and dedication to God. They were *not* designed to obtain forgiveness for sins. If you sinned you were supposed to offer a *cleansing* offering, not a commitment offering. (Cleansing offerings will be discussed later.)

The first type of commitment offering was the **burnt offering**. In that offering, an animal was sacrificed in order to express a person's dedication to God. These offerings were given voluntarily and had nothing to do with atoning for sin. The regulations that governed burnt offerings varied depending on the type of animal that was being offered. In the burnt offering one could offer a bull, a sheep, a goat, or a bird. Different regulations governed the sacrifice of each type of animal, but they all had to be a male and without a blemish of any kind. (In other words, they had to offer a perfect sacrifice.)

These are the regulations that governed the offering of a bull:

Leviticus 1:2: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.

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 savor unto the Lord."

To perform the offering, the person who brought the animal would kill it (yes, the person had to kill it themselves), and the priest would sprinkle its blood around the bronze altar that was in the outer courtyard of the tabernacle. The person would then cut the animal into pieces and the priests would take those pieces and place them into the fire to be consumed. After the animal had been burned its ashes were taken to a ceremonially clean place outside the camp; they were not thrown away because they were too holy.

In the ritual of the burnt offering, the person who was offering the animal was commanded to place his hand on the animal's head. This signified that the animal represented them, and it transferred their sin and guilt to the animal (even though this was not a sin or guilt offering). By doing this they were telling God that just as the animal was completely consumed in the fire, they were likewise completely giving themselves over to

Him.

The fire in which the offerings were burned was kept burning continually. It is possible that the original spark that started the fire was provided by God Himself.

One striking example of a burnt offering can be found in 2 Chronicles:

2 Chronicles 1:1: “And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly.

2 Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers.

3 So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. ...

6 And Solomon went up thither to the brasen altar before the LORD, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it.

7 In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.”

If you are not familiar with the sacrificial system then it is easy to read this passage and think that Israel had gathered to confess their sins. However, verse 6 tells us that Solomon offered *burnt offerings*. The burnt offering was an offering of *dedication*, not an offering for sin. What Solomon actually did was gather the entire nation together (including all of its leadership) and offer sacrifices that expressed their dedication to God. Solomon was telling God that all of Israel was going to follow Him. They were wholly committing themselves to following the Lord – and after

they did that, God appeared to Solomon and asked him what he wanted.

Do you see how important it is to understand the sacrificial system? Once you realize the significance behind burnt offerings, the entire passage comes into focus. When reading the Old Testament it is very important to remember that burnt offerings are offerings of dedication. If you keep that fact in mind you'll be surprised at how many passages it illuminates.

The **meal offering** was another type of commitment offering, but flour was offered instead of an animal. (This offering is also called the “meat offering”, even though no meat was involved. A long time ago the word “meat” simply meant “food”.) This offering could never be given by itself; it had to be accompanied by an animal sacrifice. While this may seem strange, it actually makes sense if you think about it. After all, if your sin hasn't been atoned for then anything else you offer God will not be accepted. You can only approach God and offer your gifts *after* your sins have been forgiven.

There are several different types of meal offerings; they varied, depending on the ingredients of the offering. One type of offering is described here:

Leviticus 2:1: “And when any will offer a meat offering unto the Lord, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon:

2 And he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord:

3 And the remnant of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of

the offerings of the Lord made by fire.”

This offering is treated differently from the burnt offering. In the burnt offering the entire animal was burned and its ashes were then taken outside the camp and placed in a designated area. In the meal offering, however, the priests only burned a handful of flour (the memorial portion for the Lord). The rest of it was given to the priests, who were commanded to eat it in the Holy Place of the tabernacle.

There is some important symbolism present in the meal offering. The frankincense that is burned represents prayer:

Psalms 141:2: “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

Revelation 5:8: “And when he had taken the book, the four breasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.”

It's also worth noting that Jesus claimed to be the Bread of Life, the very thing that was being offered in the meal offering:

John 6:35: “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

The meal offering had to be accompanied by oil (either poured on it or mingled with it) and it had to include salt, both of which can be seen as representing portions of Christ's work. Christians, after all, are called to be the salt of the earth, and in the Bible oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

Leaven and honey could not be included in the meal

offering (Lev. 2:11):

Leviticus 2:11: “No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire.”

In the Bible leaven always represents sin. You would certainly not want to include sin in your offering to the Lord! (As far as I can tell, the reason honey was restricted was because it has the ability to act like leaven.)

There is also the **drink offering**, which is very similar to the meal offering except that it consisted of wine instead of flour. Although the meal offering was consumed by the priests, it is important to note that the priests did *not* drink the wine. Instead the entire amount was poured out onto the altar. Like the other commitment offerings, this offering symbolized being poured out in dedication to the Lord.

The sacrifice of Christ fulfilled the dedication offering. The Bible tells us that He was poured out:

Psalms 22:14: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.”

Isaiah 53:12: “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Interestingly, the Bible calls us to be living sacrifices, *dedicated* to Him:

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

That is indeed our “reasonable service”.

Communion Offerings

Communion offerings were also called fellowship offerings. Whereas commitment offerings expressed one's dedication to God and cleansing offerings were offered to obtain forgiveness, communion offerings were about fellowship – fellowship with God and with man. Communion offerings were offered to express thanksgiving, to perform a vow, or simply as a freewill offering. If you wanted to show God that you were grateful for a blessing then you would come to the Temple and offer a communion offering.

When a burnt offering was offered, the entire animal was consumed in the fire. Communion offerings, though, were quite different. While a small portion of the animal was still burned, a large part of it was given to the priests to eat and the rest was eaten by the family who offered it. This meant that part of the animal was offered as a sacrifice and the rest became a meal. In the Middle East meals held a special significance. Having dinner with someone meant that you were ending hostilities with them. It made the person you were dining with your friend and it demonstrated unity.

As a side-note, the Jews did not usually eat their animals because they were too valuable. Eating a dinner of meat (which, of course, you would do when you offered a peace offering) would have been a special occasion.

The only communion offering was the **peace offering**.

Compared to other types of sacrifices, the regulations governing peace offerings were very relaxed. Other offerings required a male animal, but with peace offerings a female animal was acceptable. Other offerings required a perfect animal, but with peace offerings you were allowed to sacrifice animals that had blemishes.

Peace offerings could consist of either animals or bread. One example of the regulations surrounding peace offerings can be found in this passage:

Leviticus 7:11: “And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer unto the Lord.

12 If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and the unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour, fried.

13 Besides the cakes, he shall offer for his offering leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offerings.

14 And of it he shall offer one out of the whole oblation for a heave offering unto the Lord, and it shall be the priest's that sprinkleth the blood of the peace offerings.”

The offering was to be eaten that day. The only exception was in the case of vows, where the remainder could be eaten the next day. Anything that still remained on the third day could not be eaten:

Leviticus 7:15: “And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered; he shall not leave any of it until the morning.

16 But if the sacrifice of his offering be a vow, or

a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offereth his sacrifice: and on the morrow also the remainder of it shall be eaten:

17 But the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burnt with fire.

18 And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings be eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be imputed unto him that offereth it: it shall be an abomination, and the soul that eateth of it shall bear his iniquity.”

If any part of the offering touched something that was unclean, that part had to be burned instead of eaten:

Leviticus 7:19: “And the flesh that toucheth any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burnt with fire: and as for the flesh, all that be clean shall eat thereof.”

Also, no one who was unclean was allowed to eat of this offering. The penalty for taking part in a peace offering when you were unclean was very severe:

Leviticus 7:20: “But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.

21 Moreover the soul that shall touch any unclean thing, as the uncleanness of man, or any unclean beast, or any abominable unclean thing, and eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which pertain unto the Lord, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.”

An example of peace offerings can be found in the book of 1 Kings. When Solomon dedicated the Temple he offered 142,000 peace offerings:

1 Kings 8:63: “And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord.

64 The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord: for there he offered burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings: because the brasen altar that was before the Lord was too little to receive the burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings.

65 And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the Lord our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days.”

As you can see, the Israelites feasted on them for two weeks.

Interestingly, no one was allowed to eat the fat or the blood from offerings:

Leviticus 3:17: “It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood.”

Instead it was always given to God.

Cleansing Offerings

There were two types of offerings in the levitical system that dealt with being cleansed from sin: the guilt offering (also known as the trespass offering) and the sin offering. The **sin offering** focused on the person's *guilt before God*, and dealt with accidental violations of the Law. The **trespass offering** focused on *damage done to other people*. When some sort of cleansing offering was required, the person would go before a priest and the priest would examine the offense and determine what type of sacrifice was needed.

It is very important to realize that both of these offerings dealt with *accidental* violations of the law. Neither of these sacrifices were able to forgive someone who had intentionally and knowingly sinned. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband he was not committing an accidental violation of the law – and that is why David couldn't just offer a sacrifice and move on. Also, cleansing offerings were only available in cases where the person was aware of the law *but did not realize that they had broken it*. This is *not* talking about people who were unaware of the law. (After all, if it was then people could get off free and clear by making sure they never studied the law or learned anything about it!)

The **sin offering** (which focused on guilt before God) is described in Leviticus 4. One of the interesting things about this sacrifice is that it varied depending on your position in society. Basically, the higher a person's position in society, the more expensive the sacrifice:

Leviticus 4:3: “If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering.”

Leviticus 4:13: “And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty;

14 When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Leviticus 4:22: “When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty;

23 Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish:”

Leviticus 4:27: “And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty;

28 Or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned.”

As you can see, the priest was to bring a young bullock, the whole congregation had to bring a bullock, the ruler had to bring a male kid of the goats, and a common person was to bring a female kid of the goats or a female lamb. A poor person could bring a dove or a pigeon, and a very poor person could bring fine flour.

The person who was making the offering had to identify with it by laying his hands on it:

Leviticus 4:4: “And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the Lord.”

When the whole nation had sinned, the elders of the land did this.

After the animal was slain, its blood was presented to God:

Leviticus 4:5: “And the priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation:

6 And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the veil of the sanctuary.

7 And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

In the case of the priest and the nation, part of the blood was sprinkled before the veil and the horns of the altar of incense in the holy place, while the rest was poured out at the base of the altar. In the case of leaders and the common people, the blood was applied to the horns of the brazen altar at the door of the tabernacle.

The fat was burned on the altar, but the rest of the sacrifice was burned at a clean place outside the camp:

Leviticus 4:8: “And he shall take off from it all the fat of the bullock for the sin offering; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards,

9 And the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away,

10 As it was taken off from the bullock of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall burn them upon the altar of the burnt offering.

11 And the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung,

12 Even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt.”

This was quite different from the burnt offering, where the animal was burned at the temple and only the ashes were disposed of outside the camp. Interestingly, the book of Hebrews says this:

Hebrews 13:12: “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”

The sin offering focused on one's guilt before God and was burned outside the gate. The death of Christ also focused on our guilt before God – and He was crucified outside the gate.

The **trespass offering** (which focused on damage done to

other people) is described Leviticus 5. This offering is for those who have sinned through *ignorance* – they knew the law but violated it accidentally, without knowing what they had done. It's worth noting that even though the sin was done in ignorance, the person was still guilty before God and had to offer a sacrifice in order to be forgiven. Sinning through ignorance was no defense: the sin still had to be paid for, and that meant a sacrifice had to be made. The Lord never simply overlooks sin. All sin, accidental or otherwise, must be paid for.

This sacrifice involved confessing the sin, making restitution for the damage, paying a 20% fine on top of that, and offering a ram to the Lord. The priest valued the ram in order to verify its value. (The restitution and fine were first given to the priest so that the priest could verify that everything was in order and it was permissible to offer the sacrifice.)

Leviticus 5:15: “If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the Lord; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering;

16 And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.

17 And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.

18 And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall

make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him.

19 It is a trespass offering: he hath certainly trespassed against the Lord."

If the offended party wasn't available to receive the restitution then it could be paid to a relative. If there were no relatives then it remained with the priest.

The trespass offering emphasized the fact that it was a costly thing for people to sin, and it was a costly thing for God to forgive it. Forgiveness comes only by the death of an innocent substitute.

Conclusion

I think this quote sums it up well:

"Jesus provides all that we need. He is our burnt offering, and we must yield ourselves wholly to Him. He is our meal offering, the seed crushed and put through the fire, that we might have the bread of life; and we must feed upon Him. He is our drink offering who poured Himself out in sacrifice and service, and we must pour ourselves out for Him and for others. He is our fellowship offering, making life a joyful feast instead of a painful famine. He is our sin offering and our guilt offering, for He bore our sins on His body and paid the full price for our sins.

"The nation of Israel had to offer six different sacrifices in order to have a right relationship

with God, but Jesus Christ 'offered one sacrifice for sins forever' and took care of our sin problem completely." (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Holy*, pg. 29)

The Mosaic Law

This lesson provides a high-level overview of the justice system that is found in the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law touches on many different topics, but few people study it today. This is unfortunate, because the Law played a huge role in the lives of the Israelites; it is much easier to understand the Old Testament if you have a good working knowledge of the Law. If we are ignorant of the culture of those times then we will find it difficult to understand what is really going on.

Just as a proper understanding of the sacrificial system can bring new meaning to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, a better understanding of the justice system in the Old Testament can shed new light on God's thoughts and character. It is true that the Mosaic Law has passed away and does not apply to the Church, but studying the Law can still reveal how God thinks. The Bible tells us that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and the Law is an excellent example of that.

The entire concept of justice is often misunderstood. I have heard people say that an action is wrong because it hurts people, or because it's bad for society, or because it just "doesn't feel right". They define *right* and *wrong* as what helps or hurts them personally or what helps or hurts society as a whole. While that may sound reasonable, it is actually wrong. An action is right or wrong solely because *God says it is right or wrong*. Only God has the authority to make that determination, and only God has the authority to dictate what should happen when His laws are broken.

God is quite clear all throughout the Bible that when someone sins, *His* laws are being broken and *He* is the one who is being sinned against. God takes every act of disobedience personally, and He sees *Himself* as the victim.

The Mosaic Law is not a random collection of laws that were assembled from various sources; they are God's laws. The reason Israel was commanded to keep them is because the Lord was God:

Exodus 20:2: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Leviticus 18:2: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the Lord your God.

3 After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances.

4 Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God.

5 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord."

Leviticus 19:37: "Therefore shall ye observe all **my** statutes, and all **my** judgments, and do them: I am the Lord."

Notice how God repeatedly said that Israel was to obey *His* judgments because *He was God*. It is not any more complicated than that. As tempting as it might be to simply live according to our own feelings, the truth is that what we think or feel is irrelevant. All that matters is *what God has said*. When we neglect God's Word and go with our own feelings we will fall into all sorts of error.

In The Beginning

This may come as a surprise, but the very first commandment that was ever given to mankind had nothing to do with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was actually this:

Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

Mankind was instructed to populate the Earth and they did so. The commandment that Adam and Eve broke was actually given a bit later:

Genesis 2:16: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

God told Adam that mankind could eat from any tree in the garden except for one, and that one tree was forbidden on pain of death. Why was it wrong to eat from that tree? *Because God said so.* Disobeying God's commands is a sin, pure and simple.

It is very important to realize that *only* God can define what is right and what is wrong. What really counts is not our feelings or sensibilities but what God has commanded. There are times when it may be difficult to figure out how to apply a commandment to a situation, but we must never forget that what really matters is what God has said.

Why was the punishment for eating of the tree *death*? There are a number of reasons why this punishment makes sense, but what I want to emphasize is that just as God had the right to determine what is right and what is wrong, God also had the right to determine the penalty for breaking His laws. He had every right to decree that eating from the tree of the knowledge was wrong, and He had every right to decree that the punishment for breaking that law was death. I am not saying that His laws are random or that His punishments are arbitrary; that is not the case. What I am saying is that just as it has never been up to us to determine what is right and what is wrong, it is also not up to us to determine what should be done when the law is broken. That is God's decision. We are not free to make up new sins and we are not free to say that certain sinful behaviors are now “just fine”. Mankind does not have the power to change God's commands.

In the beginning God handled law enforcement **personally**. When Adam and Eve broke His commandment and ate from the tree, God Himself convicted them and issued the sentence:

Genesis 3:9: “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?”

10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?

...

17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;
19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

The same thing happened when Cain killed Abel. Cain was not handed over to the authorities because there were no authorities. Instead God handled it personally:

Genesis 4:9: “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.”

However, the situation changed after the Flood. In the covenant that the Lord made with Noah He established the **institution of government:**

Genesis 9:5: “And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he

man.”

God would no longer personally confront murderers and issue sentences. Instead, mankind was now responsible for hunting down criminals and punishing them. The Lord made it clear that the penalty for murder was *death* and that mankind should hunt down murderers and execute them. Why? Because God viewed murder as an assault on Himself. Men were made in God's image, and therefore an attack on man was an attack on God.

This is where things stood for a number of centuries. It was not until the time of Moses that God gave mankind a complete system of justice. That is the system that we will be studying.

The Mosaic Law and Justice System

There are a tremendous number of regulations in the Mosaic Law. Some people have counted more than 600 separate laws! Since it is not possible to cover every single law, I am going to narrow the focus of this lesson. There are many restrictions that deal with food, and while those regulations are important I am not going to cover them. I'm also not going to cover the regulations regarding sacrifices, or the handling of the dead, or how to deal with mold, or what to do when someone gets sick with leprosy, or the regulations regarding slavery. There is simply not enough time or space to deal with those enormous subjects. Instead I am going to focus on the basic “crime and punishment” laws.

The Ten Commandments are very famous and can be found listed in Exodus 20. However, what some people forget is that the Law of Moses consists of a great deal more than just those ten commands. After God audibly gave Israel those commands, the Israelites actually **lost their nerve** and asked

Moses to get God to stop talking to them:

Exodus 20:18: “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

It is important to remember that when God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments He was not speaking through someone else. God was actually speaking to the Israelites *personally*, in an audible voice! This completely unnerved the Israelites; they could not handle it. Instead they asked Moses to go to God on their behalf, find out what the Law was, and then report back to them. They simply could not handle interacting directly with God.

My point is that the law contains a great deal more than just ten commands. However, the Ten Commandments are a good place to start. Those laws establish a number of themes that can be found throughout the rest of God's decrees. In fact, one could say that the rest of God's laws are simply further exposition on these ten commands:

#1: Worship God; do not worship anyone else.

#2: Idol making and idol worship is strictly forbidden. You are not even allowed to use an idol to worship the true God.

#3: Do not take the Lord's name lightly – either by swearing or in any other way. His name and everything about Him is holy.

#4: You are strictly forbidden from working on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week (our Saturday).

#5: Honor your father and mother and treat them with respect.

#6: You must not murder people.

#7: You must not commit adultery.

#8: You must not steal.

#9: You must not bear false witness against your neighbor. This can be likened to telling a lie that is calculated to cause your neighbor harm – such as trying to frame someone for murder. (The Bible does prohibit other types of lies as well.)

#10: You must not covet (desire) things that belong to someone else.

Since these commands are very famous I will not elaborate on them. Instead let's take a look at some of the other aspects of the Mosaic Law.

The Trial

How were trials conducted in the Old Testament? Well, the Lord instituted a series of **judges** that were responsible for trying cases:

Deuteronomy 16:18: "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.

19 Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

20 That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

As you can see, the judges were commanded to be just. They were not allowed to accept bribes or favor one person's cause over another. **They had to be impartial.** They were not allowed to favor the rich or the poor:

Leviticus 19:15: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.”

Laws also applied equally to everyone, even to foreigners:

Leviticus 24:22: “Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the Lord your God.”

The Mosaic Law made it clear that **no one was above the law**. The law applied to kings just as much as it applied to peasants. King David was not able to get away with murder just because he was king; God punished him for it. *No one was greater than the law.*

It is interesting to note that when an exceptionally hard case came along, the matter would be brought to **the priests** and they would reveal what the Lord commanded. This is not the same thing as inquiring of the Lord with the Urim and Thummim, although that was done from time to time. Instead, God set aside certain priests who could be called upon to answer exceptionally hard questions. That is discussed here:

Deuteronomy 17:8: “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and

blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose;

9 And thou shalt come unto the priests and the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment:

10 And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall show thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee;

11 According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

12 And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.”

It is important to note that in order for someone to be put to death there had to be **at least two witnesses**, and the witnesses had to be the first ones involved in the criminal's execution:

Deuteronomy 17:6: “At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

7 The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.”

The punishment for **false witnesses** was very severe. They were to receive whatever punishment their false testimony would have inflicted upon the innocent man:

Deuteronomy 19:16: “If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;

17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days:

18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

21 And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

You were also **not allowed to prosecute and punish the innocent:**

Exodus 23:7: “Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.”

This is much more important than it seems. In some countries people are presumed guilty until they can prove that they are innocent. These countries believe that it is better to punish ten innocent people than to let one guilty person go free, and so they routinely punish innocent people. This is an abomination to God. The Lord *strictly prohibits* the prosecution of the innocent. If a society is going to punish someone it had better be *very* sure that the person is guilty. Punishing the innocent invites God's wrath.

Another interesting issue is the matter of unsolved crimes. Today an unsolved murder simply becomes a cold case that is eventually forgotten about. In the Mosaic Law, however, the situation was quite different. Even **unsolved murders** had to be dealt with. It was not simply enough to say “we tried” and then move on to the next case. God had very specific instructions about what needed to take place:

Deuteronomy 21:1: “If one be found slain in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him:

2 Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain:

3 And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take a heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke;

4 And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley:

5 And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of

the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried:

6 And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley:

7 And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it.

8 Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.

9 So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord.”

In summary, if a person was murdered and no one could tell who was responsible, the priests had to **sacrifice a heifer** that had never been used to till the ground. The elders of the nearest city had to pledge that they were not responsible for the murder and did not know who was guilty. The priests would then beg the Lord not to charge them with the blood of the murdered man, and the Lord would forgive them.

Finally, what about **juvenile offenders**? In today's society crimes that are committed by people under the age of 18 are treated very differently from crimes committed by adults. In the Mosaic Law, however, there are no specific references to ages. The Lord does not stipulate that a given punishment only applies to adults; He simply gives the crime and the punishment and leaves it at that.

While that alone is not conclusive, one can study the case law of the Old Testament and see how cases involving minors were actually handed. It turns out that in each case, children were treated exactly like adults. Their age did not affect their sentences in any way. One example of this can be seen in the matter of **Achan**. When the Israelites invaded Canaan they were told that

the city of Jericho was to be completely destroyed; no one was allowed to take any plunder from it. Achan, however, stole a few things from the city – an act that led to God withdrawing His blessing from Israel. As a result the Israelites were defeated when they attacked Ai, and a number of them were killed. Achan was sentenced to death for his crime, but he was not the only one who was executed:

Exodus 7:15: “And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel. ...

24 And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

25 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.”

It is true that the Bible does not tell us how old Achan's children were when this happened. However, remember that the entire older generation of Israelites had died in the wilderness. The only people from the previous generation who were still alive were Joshua and Caleb. Everyone else was born during the 40 years the Israelites spent wandering around the desert. Achan,

therefore, could not have been older than 40, and he may have been a lot younger than that. It's very possible that his children were younger than 20. It is also important to remember that the Mosaic Law *strictly prohibited* people from executing children for the sins of their fathers. People could only be punished for their *own* sins. If Achan's children were punished then they must have been guilty as well.

A even more striking example happened in the time of **Elisha**. This time there can be no doubt that the children were young. In this case the prophet Elisha was traveling when he encountered a group of little children:

2 Kings 2:23: “And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth **little children** out of the city, and mocked him and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

24 And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tore forty and two children of them.

25 And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.”

What is going on here? We see that a group of children (and the Bible specifically says that they were *little* children) is mocking Elisha, the prophet of the Lord. Specifically, they were telling him to “go up”. This is a reference to Elijah's ascension into Heaven, which had just happened. The children in this story were telling Elisha that he, too, should vanish off the face of the Earth. They wanted the anointed prophet of the Lord to die. By despising him they were despising his God, and the Lord was not happy about it. In response the Lord sent bears to **tear them limb from limb**.

What we can see from this is that **a sin is a sin**, regardless of the person's age. The Lord has killed both grown men and little

children. In the Mosaic Law capital crimes were not less serious simply because they were committed by someone under the age of 18.

Methods of Execution

There were several different methods of execution. One of the most common was **stoning**. An example of this can be seen in the case of a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath:

Numbers 15:32: “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35 And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”

It is interesting to see how different this is from modern executions. Today when the state executes a criminal they do everything they can to make the process as painless as possible. On top of that, in the case of a firing squad they load some of the guns with blanks so that the executioner doesn't know if he actually shot him or not. The whole idea is to make sure that the criminal does not suffer and that the person doing the executing does not know that he contributed to the criminal's death. Finally,

executions are not public spectacles. If anyone watches it is usually only those who were directly connected with the crime.

The system described in the Mosaic Law was completely different. First of all, the guilty person was executed by **stoning**. This meant that people threw rocks at him until he died of his injuries – which would have been a very painful way to die. As you can see, no one was concerned about whether the criminal would suffer during the execution. In fact, **suffering was guaranteed**.

Second, the execution was not performed by a select group of executioners. The **entire congregation** joined in throwing rocks at the criminal until he died. *Everyone* played a role in his death, and everyone *knew* they were playing a role. Finally, the execution was held **in public** where everyone could see it.

This would have had quite an impact on any onlookers. The execution would serve as a graphic, impossible-to-miss illustration of the punishment for that particular crime, and the Israelites would not have been able to miss the agony of death. They would have even *participated* in the punishment. If anyone was ever tempted to commit that particular crime they would have a clear memory of the punishment. One would imagine that this would serve as an effective deterrent.

Stoning was not the only method of execution, though. Sometimes criminals were executed by **hanging**. When the criminal was hung there was a special provision made for the disposal of their body. Their body could not be left to rot. Instead, they had to be buried that day:

Deuteronomy 21:22: “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:
23 His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy

God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

I have not found any mentions in the Mosaic Law of anyone being burned at the stake. It is true that in the matter of Achan people were burned, but that was only after they were stoned to death.

Criminals died in other ways as well. It often varied, because some crimes were punished by the **avenger**. For example, let's say that someone murdered your wife. In that case you would be *required by law* to hunt down the murderer and kill him. The way that you executed him would be up to you. You might strangle him, or stab him, or beat him to death; it was up to you. But it was your job to find him and kill him.

But what if it was just an accident? What if he didn't mean to kill her? In that case his only hope of survival was to flee to one of the cities of refuge – and that is what we will discuss next.

Cities of Refuge

In the Old Testament the penalty for murder was death. However, if you accidentally killed someone then the situation was different. In that case you had to flee to one of the six **cities of refuge**, where you had to live until the death of the High Priest. The entire system is explained in Numbers 35:

Numbers 35:9: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan;
11 Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.”

As you can see, the cities were specifically set aside for people who were guilty of **accidentally killing someone**. They were *not* designed to protect murderers. These cities were placed at convenient places throughout the land of Israel so that they were within reach of the entire population. Anyone who lived in one of the cities of refuge was protected from the **avenger**:

Numbers 35:12: “And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.”

The avenger can be thought of as something like a modern bounty hunter. If a man was guilty of murder then the avenger (who was the **nearest relative** of the person who had been murdered) was responsible for hunting the murderer down and executing him.

Israel had six cities of refuge – three east of the Jordan and three west of it:

Numbers 35:13: “And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge.

14 Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.”

Once a person fled to one of the cities of refuge he was put on trial and the facts of the case were determined. If he was actually a murderer then he would be put to death:

Numbers 35:15: “These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them; that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.

16 And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

17 And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

18 Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: and the murderer shall surely be put to death.”

One of the interesting things about this particular case is that the definition of murder was a lot stricter in the Mosaic Law than it was today. In this example, the person **assaulted a victim and the victim died**. Whether the person *intended* for the victim to die was irrelevant; if the result of the assault was death then the crime was murder and the murderer was to be executed. In other words, if you deliberately hit someone and they died as a result of that injury then you couldn't claim that you didn't mean to kill him. That did not work. The Mosaic Law did not have different classifications of manslaughter and homicide. If you killed someone you either did it accidentally or you did it on purpose. If you did it on purpose then you were executed.

As was said earlier, the avenger is the person who was responsible for hunting down and executing the murderer:

Numbers 35:19: “The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.”

Once the criminal had been tried and sentenced there was no further legal action. The criminal was executed by the avenger:

Numbers 35:20: “But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die;

21 Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.”

Once again God makes it clear that if the killing was **intentional** (as opposed to accidental) then the crime was murder and the avenger was commanded to slay the murderer. If it was accidental, though, then his life would be spared:

Numbers 35:22: “But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,

23 Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm:”

The difference between murder and an accident was the person's intent. If the person acted with the **intent** of inflicting harm then the crime was murder. However, if the person didn't mean to inflict any harm then it was not murder – but that did *not* mean that he was allowed to go free. Since he had killed someone he had to **remain in the city of refuge until the High Priest died:**

Numbers 35:24: “Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:

25 And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with holy oil.”

The death of the High Priest would atone for the blood that had been shed, and the person could then leave the city and go on with his life. However, *only* the death of the High Priest could wash away the stain of the innocent blood. God went on to explain what would happen if the man chose to leave the city of refuge before the High Priest died:

Numbers 35:26: “But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled;

27 And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood:

28 Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.”

In other words, if the slayer left the city before the High Priest died, the avenger of blood had every right to **hunt him down and kill him**. The slayer was required to stay within the city limits until the death of the High Priest; otherwise he risked being killed at the hand of the avenger.

God ended this section with a final warning:

Numbers 35:29: “So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

30 Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

31 Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but

he shall be surely put to death.

32 And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.

33 So shall ye not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

34 Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.”

Notice how God took great pains to command that murderers were to be executed **without exception**. There is no talk of rehabilitation or releasing the murderer back into society; in fact, that was strictly prohibited. Verse 31 is quite explicit: the *only* sentence you could issue for murder was death. The blood of murdered individuals defiled the land, and the only way the land could be cleansed was by executing the criminal who was responsible.

Capital Crimes

There are quite a few capital crimes in the Old Testament. First, **murder** (a violation of the sixth commandment) was punishable by death:

Exodus 21:12: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.”

However, as we've explained, if a person killed someone accidentally then the situation was different. In that case the

slayer would flee to one of the cities of refuge, where he had to live until the High Priest died.

As a side-note, the Mosaic Law allowed people to kill burglars who were caught breaking into their home. However, there was an exception to this:

Exodus 22:2: “If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.

3 If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.”

What the Law is communicating here is that although it's not murder to defend yourself, it *is* murder to kill people who are stealing your property. Thieves were required to make restitution; they were not supposed to be executed and you were not allowed to kill them. However, if you caught someone breaking into your house at night then you could assume that your life was in danger and act accordingly. The point here is *not* “It's ok to kill burglars at night but not during the daytime”; the point is that thieves should not be killed at all, except when you have good reason to believe that your life is in danger.

This brings up another point. There were a number of situations in the Mosaic Law where you could kill someone without being guilty of murder. For example, if you were the avenger of blood and you killed the murderer that you were chasing then you were not guilty of murder. If someone attacked you and you defended yourself then you were not guilty of murder. If you were a soldier and killed someone in battle then you were not guilty of murder. If a thief broke into your home and threatened your life and you killed him then you were not guilty of murder either. In all of those cases you were not guilty of murder or accidental death, so you did not have to move to the city of refuge. You were placed in a different category altogether.

Criminal negligence was also a crime. If you made a decision that you **knew** was likely to result in someone's death, and someone died as a result, then you were guilty of murder:

Exodus 21:28: “If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit.

29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death.”

In this case the owner of the ox knew that he had a dangerous animal that had tried to kill people in the past, but he did nothing about it. Since he knew about it and did nothing, he was held responsible when the ox killed someone. He should have taken steps to resolve the problem.

A modern example of this would be drunk driving. Society takes great pains to ensure that all drivers know that drinking while intoxicated leads to accidents – including fatal accidents. If drunk driving had been an issue back in the days of the Mosaic Law, a drunk driver who ran into someone and killed him would have been executed for murder. It would not have been considered an accident because the driver knew that drinking while intoxicated was dangerous, and he deliberately chose to do it anyway. Since the driver chose to engage in reckless behavior, and since that behavior killed someone, he would have been executed. (However, he would not have been executed until he actually killed someone.)

Another capital crime was **hitting your mother and father** (a violation of the fifth commandment):

Exodus 21:15: “And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.”

And **cursing your parents** (also a violation of the fifth commandment):

Exodus 21:17: “And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”

And **being a chronically rebellious child**:

Deuteronomy 21:18: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father; or the voice of his mother; and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

19 Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;

20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

It seems unbelievable that God commanded the *death penalty* in these cases, but God takes honoring parents very seriously. Just because we don't think it's a big deal doesn't mean that God agrees with us. When He commanded that we should honor our father and mother He really meant it.

Another capital crime was **kidnapping** (a violation of the eighth commandment):

Exodus 21:16: “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.”

Witchcraft was also on the list (and a violation of the first commandment). This crime may seem quaint to us today, but even in modern times there are people all over the world who deal with evil spirits. The Lord made it clear that witchcraft was a very grave sin:

Exodus 22:18: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”

Leviticus 20:6: “And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.”

Deuteronomy 18:10: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch.

11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

12 For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.”

This passage is not talking about Harry Potter-type magic, where someone waves a magic wand and something arbitrary happens. Real wizards and witches are people who seek out demons and form a relationship with them in order to get the demons to do their bidding. This is a *very great sin*. No Christian

should be forging a relationship with demons and going to them for help.

Worshiping someone other than God (a violation of the first commandment) was also punishable by death:

Exodus 22:20: “He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed.”

Deuteronomy 13:6: “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;

7 Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;

8 Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:

9 But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

10 And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

11 And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.”

Ancient Israel was not supposed to be a pluralistic society. People were not allowed to join other religions, hold other beliefs,

or worship other gods. God commanded the Israelites to execute *anyone* who tried to get them to worship pagan gods. It didn't matter if the guilty party was their wife, daughter, son, or friend; they were to be executed for trying to turn Israel away from God. The Lord even specified the method of execution: they were to be stoned to death by the *entire congregation*. Everyone was to take part in putting them to death.

God went even further and explained that this provision applied to **cities** as well:

Deuteronomy 13:12: “If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying,

13 Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;

14 Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently, and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing is certain, that such abomination is wrought among you;

15 Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.

16 And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God: and it shall be an heap forever; it shall not be built again.

17 And there shall cleave naught of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers;

18 When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the

Lord thy God, to keep all his commandments which I commanded thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God.”

If an entire city was found to have departed from God, the Lord commanded that the city be utterly destroyed. Everyone in it was to be killed, right down to the animals. The city was to be burned with fire and left as a trash heap, never to be rebuilt. No one was allowed to take any spoil from the city; the entire area was cursed. The Lord was quite serious that He alone was to be worshiped.

Another capital crime was **breaking the Sabbath** (a violation of the fourth commandment):

Exodus 31:14: “Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.”

Blasphemy was also a capital crime (and a violation of the third commandment):

Leviticus 24:16: “And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.”

Leviticus 18 and 20 has a long list of **forbidden sexual practices** (violations of the seventh commandment), nearly all of

which were punishable by death. Most of these fell into several categories: adultery, sex with family members (incest), sex with neighbors, sex with animals, and homosexuality. The punishment in each of these cases was death for both parties. To quote just one part of this large section:

Leviticus 20:10: “And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

Rape (another violation of the seventh commandment) was also punishable by death:

Deuteronomy 22:25: “But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die:”

Non-Capital Crimes

There were many crimes in the Mosaic Law that were not punishable by death. For example, if a man caused another man to be injured, the person responsible for the assault had to **reimburse the victim for all medical expenses, as well as the loss of time due to his injuries:**

Exodus 21:18: “And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed:
19 If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only

he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.”

If the victim was completely healed then the matter was considered to be settled. However, if the victim was permanently injured then the **criminal was to be injured in the same way that he had injured the victim:**

Exodus 21:23: “And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,
24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”

So then, if a criminal took another person's life then his own life was to be taken. If he cut off someone's hand then his own hand was to be cut off. **Justice demanded that whatever he did to his victim be done to him.** Jail time was not an option; in fact, jail is not mentioned anywhere in the Mosaic Law.

Let's pause for a moment and bring up another point. Some people have claimed that Christ disagreed with this provision of the Law during His Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:38: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.
41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”

Although this passage is very famous, I'm afraid that people have completely misunderstood it. Notice that verse 40

contains the all-important phrase “at the law”. What Jesus was actually telling people was that *they were required to comply with judgments that were handed down by the courts*. If you were sued and the court took away your cloak, you were required to comply with that. If the Romans passed a law requiring you to carry their soldier's pack, then you were to comply. In fact, Jesus said that instead of seeking your revenge, God wanted you to go above and beyond what the law stated.

As you can see, this is a completely different issue and has nothing to do with what the Mosaic Law was talking about. All Jesus was really saying was that Christians are **not allowed to take revenge**. People were taking the “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” rule to mean that they could go beyond the law and exact their own revenge. Revenge, however, has always been forbidden – even in the Mosaic Law itself:

Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.”

Notice that the idea of **loving your neighbor as yourself** actually comes from *Leviticus*. That concept was not something new that had never been taught before. The same Mosaic Law that contained the “eye for an eye” rule *also told people to love their neighbors*. There is a tremendous difference between a court handing down a legal sentence and a person going around the law to get their own revenge. Those two situations should not be confused.

The Mosaic Law also had protections for innocent bystanders. For example, in the event that two people got in a fight and one of them accidentally injured a woman in such a way that the woman **gave birth prematurely** (but the woman and her baby were unharmed) then the attacker had to **pay a fine**:

Exodus 21:22: “If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall surely be punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

23 And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”

In this particular case, although the criminal meant to attack the man, he did not mean to attack the woman; the attack on her was truly an accident. If the woman and her child were uninjured (in other words, no “mischief” followed) then the attacker was required to pay however much the judges determined. However, if mischief *did* follow then Exodus 21:23 kicked in: he had to pay an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. If the baby died then the man was executed, because his intentional attack resulted in the death of an innocent bystander.

The principal here is one of **restitution**. Just because it was an accident does not mean that the attacker was not responsible for damages. He still had to make it right.

Theft was also discussed. If a thief stole something, he was required to **restore what he stole and then pay more on top of that**. The penalty that he had to pay varied depending on what was stolen, but it was always several times more than the value of the stolen property. Generally, the more valuable the stolen item, the greater the multiplier:

Exodus 22:1: “If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.”

Stealing an oxen would have been far worse than stealing a sheep. People depended upon oxen to survive; they needed them for plowing and for other farm work. Sheep were important too, but the loss of a single sheep was not likely to put the survival of an entire family in jeopardy. The loss of an ox, however, could do just that.

The general theme for thefts was that the thief had to **make restitution**. For example, if a person deliberately caused harm to his neighbor then he had to repay whatever harm he caused:

Exodus 22:5: “If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.”

Any criminal who was guilty of **arson** also had to repay whatever was burned in the fire:

Exodus 22:6: “If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”

Jail time was not an option, nor was the person executed (unless the action they took resulted in someone's death). They had to repay what they had stole – even if that meant selling themselves into slavery to pay the debt.

Finally, I have only found one crime in the Mosaic Law that was punished by **having one's hand cut off**. That crime is not theft, but is something else altogether. I think this speaks for itself:

Deuteronomy 25:11: “When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets:
12 Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her.”

Other Crimes

The Mosaic Law contains a number of other practices that were forbidden, but for which there was no specific punishment. For example, people were forbidden from **charging interest on loans to the poor**:

Exodus 22:25: “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.”

People were allowed to charge interest to other people, but not to the poor. The poor were exempt.

You were also forbidden from **cursing rulers and judges**:

Exodus 22:28: “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.”

(In this context, 'gods' means 'judges'.) I think it is pretty clear that going around chanting “Death to the king!” would have been a gross violation of this commandment. It's one thing to rebuke a ruler for sinning; God often used His prophets to rebuke kings. However, cursing them was another matter entirely. You were not allowed to curse your parents or your rulers.

Another class of crimes was **fraud** (which is really just another form of stealing) and **withholding a man's wages**:

Leviticus 19:13: “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.”

In the above example, a day laborer needed his wages so that he could feed himself and his family. Powerful people might withhold a man's wages just because they could, but this was strictly prohibited. You were not allowed to make other people suffer just so you could improve your own life.

Along that same line, you were not allowed to purposefully **make life difficult for the disabled**:

Leviticus 19:14: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord.”

Weights and measurements also had to be just and equal:

Leviticus 19:35: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.

36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

A modern example of this commandment would be that a gallon jug of milk had to actually contain an entire gallon of milk. Merchants had to be just and fair.

Also, if you saw someone in distress you were required to **lend them a hand**:

Deuteronomy 22:4: “Thou shalt not see thy

brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.”

A family's livelihood could depend on the life of their ox. If you saw that their ox was in trouble you couldn't just walk away and do nothing about it. You had to stop and help. You were not allowed to say “Oh well,” and go on with your life. You were your brother's keeper.

You also had to take **reasonable precautions to safeguard the lives of others:**

Deuteronomy 22:8: “When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.”

Since the roof of a house was considered part of its living space, you had to build a battlement in order to keep people from falling off the roof. This was simply another example of “love your neighbor as yourself”.

Finally, if you made your money through prostitution you were **not allowed to take that money and offer it to God:**

Deuteronomy 23:18: “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the Lord thy God.”

This may seem strange, but the basic idea was that if you made your money through a means that God had condemned as sinful then you couldn't take the reward of that activity and offer it to God. The Lord wanted no part of it; it was an abomination to Him.

Waging War

The Mosaic Law had quite a bit to say about how wars should be waged. In fact, there were two separate sets of commands. The Lord said that when it came to waging war against the **people who lived in Canaan**, the Israelites were to practice nothing less than total annihilation:

Deuteronomy 20:16: “But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth:

17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee:

18 That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the Lord your God.”

In verse 18 the Lord explained the reason behind this policy: He did not want the Israelites to **copy the lifestyles** of the natives. As it turned out, though, the Israelites did *not* wipe out the native Canaanites and they *did* copy their practices. This eventually caused God's judgment to fall upon Israel, and they were evicted from the land and carried away to Babylon.

When it came to waging war against people who lived in other countries, though, a different set of regulations applied. First, the Lord said that the people of Israel were to trust God for victory and not place their hope in the size of their army:

Deuteronomy 20:1: “When thou goest out to

battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

2 And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,

3 And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them;

4 For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

The Lord said that He was the one who would give them strength to win the battle. What mattered was not the size of their army but **the size of their God**. No army could stand against the might of the Living God. Throughout the Scriptures the Lord said that He was the one who gave military victory:

Psalm 33:16: “There is no king saved by the multitude of a host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.

17 A horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he delivery any by his great strength.

18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;

19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield.”

God wanted people to realize that **He was the one who**

governed over their lives and their situations. Victory – or defeat – was in His hands. He did not want the Israelites to start focusing on their own strength or trusting in themselves for victory. He wanted all of their hope and trust to be focused on Him.

The Mosaic Law also said that there were certain people who were not allowed to join the army:

Deuteronomy 20:5: “And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it.

6 And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it.

7 And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.”

Here we have three different cases: a man who had just **built a house**, a man who had just **planted a vineyard**, and a man who was **engaged but not yet married**. In each case the Lord said that the person should go back home, lest he die and not be able to partake of the fruit of his labors. It was important to God that people be allowed to reap what they sowed – not just in a bad way, but in a good way as well.

There was another type of person who was not permitted to be in the army:

Deuteronomy 20:8: “And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his

house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.”

Anyone who was afraid was required to go home. This was to keep the fearful person from infecting the rest of the army. The end result was that the army was made up entirely of people who were not afraid. They were to be **fearless warriors** whose heart was completely focused on the Lord. David's battle with Goliath is a great example of this; he was not afraid to fight because he trusted God.

The Mosaic Law makes a brief mention of military ranks:

Deuteronomy 20:9: “And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.”

The army was to have captains who were in charge. They were responsible for leading the army into battle.

As far as the actual fighting was concerned, the first thing the Israelites were required to do when attacking a city was offer it **terms of surrender**:

Deuteronomy 20:10: “When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it.

11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.”

If the city accepted the terms then they would become servants of the Israelites. However, if the city rejected these terms then the Israelites were allowed to **attack**:

Deuteronomy 20:12: “And if it will make no

peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it:

13 And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword:

14 But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.”

In modern times, whenever the United States conquers another country the first thing it does is take billions of dollars from American taxpayers and use that money to repair the country that they just defeated. The United States then sets up a government composed of local citizens and leaves, allowing that country to continue on as a sovereign nation.

It's easy to think that countries have always done this, but that is not the case. The Lord said that when the Israelites conquered a city they were to **slaughter all of the males**, take the women and children captive as **slaves**, and then **loot the city** and take the plunder for themselves. There is no mention of nation building or allowing things to go back to normal. Instead, the enemy city was completely destroyed and its land became part of Israel's territory.

Another regulation regarding warfare dealt with the practice of the **siege**:

Deuteronomy 20:19: “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege:

20 Only the trees which thou knowest that they

be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war against thee, until it be subdued.”

The Lord said that the Israelites were not allowed to practice scorched earth warfare. They were to take care to not cut down any trees that were used for food. God did not want the Israelites to destroy the countryside and make it uninhabitable.

Regulations for Kings

Throughout the Scriptures there are a number of regulations that are specific to kings. The Lord spent quite a bit of time explaining how a wise and righteous king should behave. Although there are a number of passages throughout the Bible that we could look at, I want to focus on a passage in the Mosaic Law that contains some specific instructions for kings.

Before we get started, though, I'd like to point out how odd it is that the Lord would take the time to do this. After all, God told Israel that they were to be a theocracy, with the Lord Himself reigning as their king. However, God also knew that Israel did not want Him to be their king and that they would one day ask for a human king. With this in mind God set down a few rules for this future king:

Deuteronomy 17:14: “When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;”

When the Israelites were still wandering around in the

desert, decades before they ever crossed over the Jordan to begin conquering the land of Canaan, the Lord already knew that they would **reject Him as king**. Sure enough, that is exactly what happened in the days of Samuel:

1 Samuel 8:4: “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.

7 And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”

The Lord told Israel that by requesting a king they were **rejecting God**. The Israelites did not want God to reign over them. Since that time thousands of years ago nothing has changed. To this day the Israelites still reject God and they still do not want the Lord to reign over them. Jesus Himself commented on this very fact as He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified:

Matthew 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

One day the situation will change and the Israelites will accept Jesus as their King – but that day has not yet come to pass.

Since God knew that Israel was going to rebel against him, He laid down some regulations regarding kings:

Deuteronomy 17:15: “Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.”

First, Israel had to let **God pick their king**. They were not allowed to pick just anyone and they were not allowed to set a **foreigner** over them. Their king had to be an Israelite.

Second, the king to **trust in God for aid**, not in a large army of horses or in the power of a foreign ally:

Deuteronomy 17:16: “But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.”

As was discussed earlier, the Lord wanted the Israelites to

trust in Him for victory. The king's heart was to be fixed on God. He was not allowed to amass a huge army or put his trust in his own strength. God wanted the king to depend on Him.

God also placed restrictions on the king's ability to amass wealth and wives:

Deuteronomy 17:17: “Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he **greatly** multiply to himself silver and gold.”

The king was forbidden from putting together a **harem** for fear that having many wives would turn the king's heart away from God. Solomon rejected this command and amassed hundreds of wives – and sure enough, those wives turned his heart away from God. The Lord did not want the king to have anything in his life that would lead them away from Him.

Also, the king was forbidden from amassing enormous amounts of wealth. He was not forbidden from *being* wealthy; it was not a sin to multiply silver and gold. The problem was with *greatly* multiplying silver and gold. Once again, the danger was that enormous wealth would cause the king to become proud and forget God. King Nebuchadnezzar is a great example of this:

Daniel 4:28: “All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar.

29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”

Nebuchadnezzar's power and wealth went to his head and made him forget God. In fact, he started seeing himself as a god and wanted the people around him to worship him. The Lord did

not want this to happen to the kings of Israel, so He forbade them from amassing extravagant wealth.

Finally, the king was required to personally **write out a copy of the entire Mosaic Law**:

Deuteronomy 17:18: “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.”

Not only was the king commanded to **personally transcribe** the entire law (thus ensuring that he had read it and was familiar with it!), but he was also required to **read it** “all the days of his life”. The purpose of this was so that the king would fear God and walk in His commandments.

The Sabbath

Many people today believe that the Bible commands Christians to not work on Sunday. However, is that actually the case? Does the Bible really require believers to set aside Sunday as a day of rest?

Before we answer this question let's take a look at some background information. At the time of Moses the Lord commanded the Israelites to honor the Sabbath day:

Exodus 20:8: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:

10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

First of all, it's important to notice that the Sabbath day was the *seventh* day of the week. God was very clear about this: the reason He “hallowed” the *last* day of the week was because He created the entire world in six days and then rested on the seventh day. This means that the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. *There has never been a commandment to rest on the first day of the week.* This means that our act of resting on the first day of the week has nothing whatsoever to do with this commandment. As Christians we do not have the liberty to take God's commands and say “Well, we'll just honor a different day of the week and call it

the same thing”. There is not one verse in the Bible that says the Sabbath was somehow changed or moved to a different day of the week.

The reason Christians gather on Sunday to worship is to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, who rose from the dead on the first day of the week. It has nothing to do with keeping the Sabbath.

However, there is something else that should not be overlooked. This command was given as a sign between God and the Israelites. In other words, this commandment was specific to *the Jews*, not to all of mankind. It never applied to Gentiles. That is made clear in this passage:

Exodus 30:13: “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.

14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefor; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”

Notice that three times in this passage the Lord clearly

says that this command applies *to the children of Israel*. This was not said about the commandment to honor your parents, or not murder, or not commit adultery, or not steal. It would have been easy for the Lord to say that this commandment applies to everyone or to all those who love Him, but that's not what He said. He went through great pains to make it clear that this command only applies *to the Jews*.

The commandment was also extremely strict. Anyone who did any work at all on the seventh day of the week (which would be our Saturday, *not* our Sunday) was to be put to death. In other passages the Bible elaborated on what was meant by not being allowed to work:

Jeremiah 17:21: “Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

22 Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.”

In this passage the Lord commanded the Israelites to bear no burdens on the Sabbath. Don't go about your normal business, don't carry things into the city, and don't even carry things out of your house. In another passage the Bible goes even further:

Exodus 35:3: “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.”

Notice that there is no exception made for winter weather! The Jews were not allowed to even *start a fire* in their own homes on the Sabbath. Even gathering sticks on the Sabbath to start a fire was punishable by death:

Numbers 15:32: “And while the children of

Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34 And they put in in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35 And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”

Simply put, you were not allowed to do *any* kind of work *whatsoever* on the Sabbath. Now it is true that in the New Testament Jesus explained that the commandment was not intended to prevent people from helping each other. The Lord healed a number of people on the Sabbath, which angered the Pharisees a great deal. But any kind of work at all – even something as mundane as starting a fire – was strictly prohibited on pain of death.

People today do not even come close to keeping this commandment. Not only do they rest on the wrong day (typically Saturday is very busy day filled with work!), but even when they rest they do all kinds of activities that would have gotten them *executed* in Old Testament days.

Another thing to notice is that the commandment says nothing about worship services, or going to the Temple, or anything of that nature. This was not a day where the Israelites set aside what they were doing so they could go to the Temple and offer sacrifices. Over and over the Lord says that He wants the Jews to keep the day holy *by not working*, not by singing hymns or listening to priests.

As a side-note, the Sabbath was not the only holy day in the Jewish calendar. Leviticus 23 gives an entire list of days that

the Jews were commanded to keep holy. The Sabbath is simply the one that we are the most familiar with. The Jews were required to keep *all* of the various Sabbaths on their calendar. As Gentiles we are required to keep *none* of them.

If you search the New Testament you will find that many of the Ten Commandments are repeated and given to the Church. However, one commandment that is *not* given to the Church is the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. In fact, the idea of the Sabbath can only be found in *one* of the epistles to the churches. This is what it says:

Colossians 2:16: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:
17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

Notice that this verse says that we aren't to judge each other on the basis of whether or not we keep certain holy days or Sabbath days. In other words, *it is left up to our discretion* what days we do or do not keep holy. This is a very far cry from executing someone for gathering sticks! In case we missed the point, the same idea can be found in Romans:

Romans 14:5: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and give God thanks.

...

10 But why doest thou judge thy brother? Or

why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Far from teaching that Christians must not work on Saturday, these verses say that Christians have liberty to do as they think best. If they want to abstain from eating meat then they may do so; if they want to eat meat then that is fine as well. If one man wants to keep a particular day holy then that is fine; if another man wants to not keep any day holy then that is equally fine. This is *not at all* what you would expect the Scriptures to say if working on the Sabbath was a sin. You will not find any passages that teach that we have the same liberty to steal, covet, lust, commit adultery, and so forth. All of those commands are still binding – but the one to honor the Sabbath day is not.

As a final note, some might point out that Jesus kept the Sabbath, and that is quite true. However, Jesus also kept the *entire* Mosaic law. The reason He did this is because He was under that law and was required to keep it. The Mosaic Law did not pass away until after He died. If the New Testament church was required to keep the Sabbath then one would expect that to be mentioned somewhere in the epistles. However, what we actually find is something entirely different. The Church is simply not required to keep the Sabbath day holy.

In summary, the law to keep the Sabbath was given only to the Jews and never applied to the Gentiles. As Christians we do not have to keep Saturday holy by not working on that day. God has given us the liberty to keep days holy or not, at our discretion. If we wish to honor God by setting aside a day of rest then we may do so, but if we do not then it is not a sin. What the Bible does say (in Romans 14:10) is that we should not judge each other on the basis of Sabbath keeping.

Tithing

In the Church today it is very common for pastors to teach that Christians are obligated to pay the tithe that is commanded in the Law of Moses. I have heard many people claim that tithing is still binding to believers today:

Numbers 18:21: “And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. ...

24 But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as a heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”

Furthermore, it is taught that the curse of Malachi rests upon those that will not pay this tithe:

Malachi 3:8: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

However, is this really true? Are Christians commanded to tithe, and are believers cursed if they do not give their local church ten percent of their income?

Before I answer these questions, let's take a look at the context of these passages. We need to understand what the tithe actually was before we can explore whether it applies today.

Background

In Numbers 8 the Lord lays down a series of ordinances regarding the Levites. The Levites were given the job of taking care of the tabernacle:

Numbers 8:19: “And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary.”

The reason the Levites were given this job is because in the Old Testament, before Jesus came, the Israelites were not allowed to interact directly with God. This was because they (like everyone else) were sinful and unholy, and if they approached God in their unholiness they would die. In order to save their lives the Lord appointed the tribe of Levi to take care of the tabernacle. The Levites were divided into two groups: Aaron and his sons were made priests and became responsible for offering the sacrifices, and the rest of the tribe was charged with taking care of the tabernacle (and later, the Temple). The Levites were the *only ones* who were authorized to serve in the tabernacle. The

Lord was quite strict about this:

Numbers 18:22: “Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die.

23 But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.”

If you were not a Levite you could not serve in the tabernacle, and the penalty for breaking this commandment was *death*. Your eligibility was determined by your ancestry. Later temples had an outer court that non-Levites could enter after they had purified themselves, but even then they could not enter the Temple itself. Even the high priest (the oldest son of Aaron of each generation) could only enter the Holy of Holies *once a year* to make atonement on behalf of the people, and before he could enter a sacrifice was first offered to cleanse his own impurities (Heb. 9:7).

Even if you *were* a Levite, the requirements for being involved in the service of the tabernacle were very strict. As Numbers 8 and Leviticus 21 explains, not only did the Levites have to be of the tribe of Levi, but they had to be of a certain age (starting at 25 and forcing mandatory requirement at age 50), have no physical handicaps (Lev. 21:17-21), and abide by certain purification laws. These were the people that interacted with God on behalf of the nation of Israel. Simply put, you had to do things God's way and you had to do things precisely right or God would strike you dead. There was no leeway for error or personal flair. Nothing less than absolute holiness and perfection could enter His presence. (Incidentally, those requirements have never changed; the only reason we can enter God's presence is because we are clothed in Jesus' righteousness. His absolute perfection cleanses us of our sins and grants us entrance to Heaven. Those who try to

enter on their own merits, or apart from Jesus, will find themselves damned. There simply is no other way.)

All of this brings up a question: if you are a Levite serving in the Temple then where does your income come from? When the land of Canaan was given to the Israelites the Levites were not given a portion of the land as an inheritance (Numbers 18:20). Instead they were to dwell in a series of cities throughout the land of Israel (Joshua 21). The tithe was given to them as their inheritance (Numbers 18:24). Since they were full-time priests and were given no land on which to grow crops, this tithe was their livelihood. The Levites depended completely upon it. When the people neglected to provide this tithe the Lord became angry, which can be seen in Malachi 3:9 (quoted at the beginning of this lesson).

The system that God established in the Old Testament could be described like this: the Israelites were not holy enough to interact directly with God. In order to save their lives the Lord took one of the tribes of Israel and dedicated them to serving in the tabernacle on behalf of the people. Since they were dedicated to the Lord's service God gave them no inheritance in the land; instead, the Israelites were to give the Levites one tenth of their crops (Lev. 27:30) and the Levites were to live off of that.

This situation changed *dramatically* when Jesus died on the cross and rose again. Jesus replaced the Levites as our bridge to God. We no longer need a high priest to offer yearly pleas for us in the Holy of Holies, for Jesus has finished our salvation. Hebrews 9 and 10 explains this in great detail, and I will only quote a portion of it here:

Hebrews 9:11: “But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;
12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the

holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. ...

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."

Christians no longer need a class of Levites to interact with God on their behalf because Christ's death has consecrated us as a nation of priests:

Hebrews 10:19: "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;"

Revelation 1:5: "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the price of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

1 Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar

people; that He should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light:”

It is very important to realize that there is no longer a tribe of Levi ministering to God on behalf of His people. Jesus has bridged the gap between man's sinfulness and God's holiness once and for all. Christians are a royal priesthood, able to boldly approach the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). In the past this would have brought instant death, but Jesus changed that forever.

Pastors today minister to the body of Christ *but they are not Levites*. In order to become a Levite you had to be able to prove the purity of your lineage (that is, present documented evidence that all of your forefathers were from the tribe of Levi), you had to be ordained in a certain way, and you had to meet certain physical characteristics. The Levites were pointing the way to what Christ would accomplish in His sacrifice, and that sacrifice has been made. Pastors today do not approach God once a year to atone for the sins of their congregations. They do not sacrifice animals on behalf of anybody. Their job is *completely different* from the Levites.

It is also worth noting that tithes were to be brought *into the Temple*. This can be seen in Malachi 3:10, in which the Lord says “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house”. In the Old Testament God did not dwell within His people. Instead the glory of God resided in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. When the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies once a year he was going before the *actual presence of God* to intercede on behalf of the nation. God Himself dwelt within the Temple, which can be seen passages such as 1 Kings 8:10-11. The reason that Jews no longer offer sacrifices today is because they have no Temple. Modern Jews also do not tithe because tithes could only be given to the Levites *and there are no Levites today*.

As Christ predicted when talking to the woman at the well (John 4:21-23), Christians do not gather at a single Temple in

order to approach the presence of God. This is because Christians *are* temples of the Living God, for God dwells within us, not inside a building in the Middle East:

1 Corinthians 3:16: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

Conclusions

It should be apparent by now that it is *impossible* for Christians today to tithe according to the Law of Moses. The tithe could only be given to the Levites (Numbers 18:24) and there are no Levites today. Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial system and brought it to an end. Even if there were Levites still around it is not possible for Christians to bring tithes into the Temple because *there is no Temple*. Instead Christ dwells within us, making our bodies the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:16).

I want to emphasize this point, because it is easily glazed over. It is *impossible* for Christians to offer the tithe that the Lord instituted in Numbers 18. It *cannot* be done. The only people who were allowed to receive the tithe was the Levites, not random Gentiles from your local community (or even random Jews, for that matter). The job of Levites was to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, which is something that pastors do not and cannot do. Pastors are *not* the same thing as Levites.

The curse and blessing of Malachi 3 simply cannot be applied to modern Christians. God was concerned about providing *the Levites* with a livelihood, but that group of people no longer exists. God no longer has a Temple in which goods can be stored and given to a priestly class. *That entire system is gone*. Even if Christians wanted to bring food into the Temple it isn't

possible because *there is no Temple anymore*. The death and resurrection of Jesus changed everything.

To put it as plainly as possible, Christians today cannot tithe as instructed in the Law of Moses. It is not possible. They can give a portion of their income to their local church, yes, *but that is not tithing*. Tithing involved giving to Levites and there are no Levites around. It involved bringing food into the Temple and there is no longer a Temple. Have you ever met *anyone* who gave a tenth of their income to a Levite? The truth is that no one has tithed according to the Law of Moses since the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. You *cannot* simply swap out pastors for Levites and churches for the Temple. The New Testament simply does not allow this (which we'll get into a bit later.)

Given this, are Christians required to give a tenth of their income to their local church? It should be clear at this point that giving a tenth of one's income to the local church is *not in any way* similar to the tithe specified in the Law of Moses. Pastors are not Levites and the local church is not the Temple. Is there a command stating that all Christians must give ten percent of their income to support their local body of believers? I believe the answer is *no* and that the New Testament model is quite different.

Some would argue that there are other examples of tithing apart from the Law of Moses. Take Jacob as an example:

Genesis 28:20: “And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, if God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.”

This passage has been used to support tithing, but I believe it actually does the opposite. If Christians are required to

tithe then why is Jacob offering to tithe if he returns in peace? After all, if God *already* required Jacob to give a tenth then this whole vow is meaningless! *This is only a gift if Jacob was not already required to give it.* Plus, how did Jacob give the offering to God? There were no priests in those days because Levi had not yet been born – much less Aaron or the other priests. Jacob, a shepherd, must have sacrificed one-tenth of his flocks on an altar. He did not give the animals to his local tabernacle. Are Christians required to take their money into their backyard and burn it, as Jacob did? I've never heard anyone suggest that, but it's worth noting that the animals that Jacob gave did *not* go to support the local priesthood – they were slaughtered and burned on an altar. (It's worth noting that the tithe in Scripture was always a portion of crops or animals, not money; Lev 27:30-32 is a good example of this. There was a monetary tax called the temple tax but that was completely different from the tithe.)

What is entirely missed is that Jacob's vow shows how little faith he really had in God. God had already given Jacob fabulous promises, but instead of believing them Jacob tried to bribe God by saying that *if* God lived up to His end of the bargain then Jacob would pay God back for it. Jacob's tithe was intended to bribe God into fulfilling His promise. Is that really an example that Christians should follow?

Another example that people sometimes use to support tithing appears in Genesis 14:

Genesis 14:18: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

After Abraham returned from conquering the armies that attacked the king of Sodom, he gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek. Some people have claimed that this proves that Christians are required to tithe, but it should be noted that Abraham *gave* tithes. If they were required then he would have *paid* them, which is quite different. A gift is not required – it is given freely. If it is required then it is payment of a debt, not a gift. Nowhere in this passage is it even suggested that Abraham was required to do what he did.

There is also the fact that Abraham was not tithing *his* property. The loot that he was tithing consisted of things he had recovered through his military victory. After Abraham gave the tithes he returned the rest of the loot to the kings of Sodom, which is who the goods had been stolen from. The loot he had tithed belonged to *them*, not to Abraham. There are *no* examples of Abraham actually tithing *things that belonged to him*.

Some would support the idea of mandatory tithing through this verse in Matthew:

Matthew 23:23: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and arise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

What we need to remember is that when Jesus said this He had not yet died – and so the Mosaic law was still in force. Jesus had to perfectly fulfill the entire Mosaic Law, and He did. (It's worth noting that Jesus also commanded the lepers He healed to show themselves to the priests. I have never heard anyone suggest that those healed of skin cancer should go to their local pastor before re-entering society – and yet that is also a command found in the Mosaic Law.)

If Christians were really required to give a tenth of their income to the local church then you would naturally expect that

fact to be mentioned *somewhere* in the New Testament, but it's not. *There is not one single verse anywhere in the New Testament that commands Christians to tithe.*

Let me give a few examples. In Acts 4:32-5:11 the Bible talks about the financial support of the new church. Instead of tithing, though, Christians did something quite different:

Acts 4:34: “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,
35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”

There is also the case of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple sold a piece of property and gave part of the proceeds to the church. When they gave the money, though, they lied and said that they were giving the entire amount that they had received. The Lord killed them for their lying, but it's interesting to notice what Peter said:

Acts 5:4: “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? ...”

Nowhere did Peter even hint that they owed a tithe on it to the church. This would have been a great place to mention that fact, if it is indeed doctrine, but the passage is silent.

Another passage that has been used to support tithing is this one:

1 Corinthians 16:1: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.
2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of

you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.”

It is important to notice that Paul is asking the Corinthian church to gather together a sum of money that he can send to *destitute people in Jerusalem*. This is *not* being collected for the support of the local church, nor is any amount or percentage specified. Paul is simply asking the Corinthians to get together and provide for the needs of their brothers and sisters in a distant country. This is *not at all* the same thing as being required to give ten percent of your income to the local church. Once again, if tithing was required this might have been a good place to mention it, but it wasn't mentioned.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul talks at length about giving, including these famous verses:

1 Corinthians 9:9: “For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

10 Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. ...

14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”

Yet in this entire chapter Paul never mentions tithing! If Christians are required to give a tenth of their income to the church then this would have been a fabulous place to mention it, but no verse makes that claim. Such a teaching is *entirely absent*

from this rather lengthy discussion of giving – and, in fact, it is also absent from *all other discussions on giving in the New Testament*.

So what is going on? The answer to this riddle can be found in 2 Corinthians 9, which says this:

2 Corinthians 9:6: “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully,

7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

In the Old Testament the Israelites were *required* to give a tenth of their crops and herds to the Levites. Anything that they gave above the tithe was a freewill offering, but the tithe was required. If the tithe was given God would send blessings, and if the tithe was withheld God would send curses and famine. The tithe was not a gift.

In the New Testament things are completely different. God simply wants us to give as we have purposed in our heart, out of love. There is no fixed amount specified, nor does it say that a tenth must be given to the local church before anything can be given to other causes. God wants us to have a heart to meet the needs around us, and to give cheerfully out of love. The real issue is the heart, not percentages.

The truth is that *everything* that we have belongs to God. We are stewards, not owners, and are commanded to use our possessions for the honor and glory of God. All of our wealth and energies and hopes and dreams are to be focused on the Lord's kingdom. God doesn't want a tenth of us; He wants *all* of us.

Christians should look at the financial resources they have been given and use them wisely for the Lord's glory. This doesn't just encompass tithing, but everything – paying bills, raising children, investing in education, buying groceries, and so forth.

Can't God be glorified when we pay our debts? When we raise our children? When we instruct others in wisdom? When we provide for those in need? When we bring the gospel to those who need it? God made the oceans, the rivers, the trees, and the fields, but too often Christians view life as being mostly secular with a few religious moments here and there. Being a Christian isn't something that you just do at church; it's the way you live your entire life. It affects how you manage your money, what entertainment you choose, what you do with your free time, how you raise your children, and how you treat your neighbors. For the children of God there is nothing that is purely secular. The Lord has laid a claim to every facet of life, and there is a time for everything.

God wants us to love and enjoy Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to be passionately devoted to following Him and loving our neighbors. That is what life is all about, and that is what life will *always* be about for the rest of time. God does not want a tenth of us; He wants all of us, devoted completely to Him in every way.

It may be that some people can give more and others can give less; in the parables some servants were given more talents than others. God is not nearly as concerned with the *amount* as He is with the *heart*. That is what it is really all about.

Slavery

First of all, under ideal circumstances the system of slavery described in the Mosaic Law would not have been needed. God was clear that if the Israelites obeyed Him there would be no poor in the land:

Deuteronomy 15:4: “Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:
5 Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.”

However, the Israelites did not obey the Lord, and so there were poor among them. Since God knew this was going to happen He established a number of provisions in the Mosaic Law that were intended to take care of the poor. For example, every seventh year the Israelites were supposed to leave their fields alone so that the poor could eat whatever grew in their vineyards and olive trees:

Exodus 23:10: "And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:
11 But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard."

Likewise, when you harvested your field in the other six

years you were to leave the corners alone and not go back a second time to reap again. What was left behind was for the poor:

Leviticus 19:9: “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.

10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.”

Moreover, the poor were not to be charged interest:

Leviticus 25:35: “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee.

36 Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee.”

On top of that, every three years the levitical tithe was to be shared with the poor:

Deuteronomy 14:28: “At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates:

29 And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.”

Finally, and most amazingly, every seven years all debts were canceled:

Deuteronomy 15:1: “At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release.

2 And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the Lord's release.”

As you can see, the Mosaic Law had a number of provisions in it that were designed to take care of the poor. Every seven years all debts were canceled and all food that was grown was given to the poor. The poor could not be charged interest. Every three years they shared in the tithes that were given to the Levites. Every year they were given the food that was in the corners of the fields and that grew after the first harvest. This is how the poor were cared for under the Mosaic Law.

However, there were cases where these provisions were not enough. In that case the poor person could choose to sell himself into slavery:

Leviticus 25:39: “And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant:

40 But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile.

41 And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return.”

It is important to note that the poor in Israel sold

themselves into slavery; they were *not* kidnapped and sold into slavery by others. They took the money that they received and used it to pay their debts. Their purchase price went to *them*, not to someone else. They were to be treated well – as servants, not slaves – and they were not sold for life: they were to be set free after a period of time.

The system of slavery that is described in the Mosaic Law is *completely different* from the system of slavery that was practiced in the United States. First of all, you could not kidnap someone and sell them as a slave, or force someone into slavery. That was punishable by death:

Deuteronomy 24:7: “If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you.”

Slavery was entered into voluntarily. You could not be stolen and sold. People who did such things were hunted down and executed.

Next, slaves were to be treated as hired servants, not as slaves. Mistreatment was forbidden:

Leviticus 25:53: “And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight.”

Masters were not allowed to kill their slaves – and if they did, they were held accountable for it:

Exodus 21:20: “And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.”

If the master caused the servant any type of permanent

physical damage, he was required to immediately set him free:

Exodus 21:26: “And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

27 And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.”

As you can see, mistreatment was strictly forbidden – but the law went even further than that. All slaves were required to take the Sabbath day off:

Deuteronomy 5:13: “Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:

14 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.”

Moreover, when masters went up to Jerusalem to make sacrifices, or partake in celebrations, or celebrate the various festivals, their slaves were to accompany them and partake in the celebration as well:

Deuteronomy 12:17: “Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand:

18 But thou must eat them before the Lord thy

God in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.”

Finally, all slaves were to be set free on the seventh year, and when they were set free they were to be let go *with payment of money*:

Deuteronomy 15:12: “And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.

13 And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty:

14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.”

So not only was the person given money when he sold himself into slavery, but when he was set free in the seventh year he was to be given *additional* payment for his years of service.

It should also be noted that the slave could purchase his freedom at any time, regardless of whether the master wanted to set him free or not. Relatives of the slave could also purchase his freedom:

Leviticus 25:48: “After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him:

49 Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him

of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.

50 And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him.

51 If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for.

52 And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption.

53 And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight.”

There is more. Slaves were to be treated as members of the household: they were to be given the same type of food that their masters ate, live in the same type of house, and sleep in the same type of bed. They were allowed to own property. As Leviticus says, slaves were to be treated as hired servants.

I hope this makes it very clear that the system of slavery described in the Mosaic Law is completely different from the system of slavery that was once practiced in this country. The two systems are completely different and should not be confused. When reading the Bible it is important to keep in mind that *this* was the system that was in place in the Old Testament. Context is crucial; if we don't keep the proper context in mind then we will jump to all sorts of erroneous conclusions.