

Chapter 27 seems like an odd way to end the book of Leviticus.

Chapter 26 ends with the blessings and the curses of the covenant.

Isn't that the end of the book?

Chapter 27 focuses on the details of offerings – particularly with respect to vows.

It brings us back full circle to the themes where Leviticus began.

The difference is that in the beginning of Leviticus

the focus was on how the offerings prepare the way for us to enter God's presence

whereas here we see how we are to live in God's presence.

And particularly, the point of chapter 27 is the sanctification of daily life.

Eleven times in this chapter we are told that something vowed becomes holy.

The question of the book of Leviticus is “who can ascend the hill of the LORD?

Who can enter the holy presence of God?”

We have often heard the theme return (especially in the last half of the book) –

“be holy as I am holy.”

God's purpose is that all the ends of the earth might become holy.

That a renewed humanity might dwell in his presence forever.

The first half of the book is all about *approaching God* (chapters 1-15),

Starting with how the priests are to conduct the sacrifices in chapters 1-7,

then the institution of the priesthood (chapters 8-10)

then dealing with clean and unclean in daily life (chapters 11-15)

At the center is the Day of Atonement (chapter 16)

Then it deals with the holy and profane in daily life (ch 17-20),

Then legislation regarding the priesthood (ch 21-22),

Before concluding with the festivals and the organization of time (ch 23-27).

So the first half of the book is about approaching God – through *blood*.

The second half of the book is about *holiness* – living in *communion* with God.

How do you draw near to God?

And then – once you are near – how do you live in communion with God?

It would be overly simplistic to say that the first half of Leviticus is about justification,
and the second half about sanctification –

but many have noticed a connection with Paul's words in Rom. 5:8-10,

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood,

much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,
much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”
[Morales, 30]

So Leviticus is about the sacrifices of Israel and it is about the holiness of Israel.
And at the very heart of the book is where sacrifice and holiness comes together –
the Day of Atonement.

The basic point comes across very clearly:
Without the sacrifices, holiness is impossible.
And without holiness, the sacrifices are meaningless.
The corporate and individual sacrifices of Israel
form the foundation for their corporate and individual practice of holiness.

In the book of Leviticus, God reveals clearly the central challenge for sinful humanity:
How can God draw near to us without destroying us?
If God is a consuming fire – if God is *holy* (and we are not) –
then how can humanity come into his presence?

The sacrifices of the OT were designed to show that the only way into God’s presence
is through blood.
But throughout the OT God makes very clear that the sacrifices are not *magical*.
It’s not that if you offer these sacrifices then you get to be near God!
That’s why the second half of Leviticus is also important.

You must be holy – as the LORD your God is holy.

Now in these final chapters, Leviticus 25-27 is teaching about the principle of redemption.
The next chapter, Numbers 1, will take us back to the narrative of Israel at Mt. Sinai,
so this chapter is plainly bound up with what precedes it.
The redemption of vows teaches us about how God will redeem his vow in Jesus Christ.

In today’s world, vows are relics of the past.
The fate of marriage vows is a good example.
The fact that half of all American marriages end in divorce
demonstrates that we do not take our vows very seriously.

What was a vow in biblical times?

“In making a vow, a person demonstrated his love for the Lord’s worship,
or his thankfulness for an answer to prayer
by earnestly resolving to dedicate something or someone
as a gift to the Lord (Hannah)
or to deny himself certain pleasures (the Nazirite–Num. 6),
or to present a certain offering (Lev. 6:6).”

Dt 23:21-23 makes it clear that vows were optional,
but if they were made, they must be kept (cf. Num. 30:2-15)

The principle of Leviticus 27 is that if you wish to redeem your vow,
then you must pay a higher price than the value of the thing that you vowed.

Leviticus 27 applies this principle to humanity, to the land, and to all the produce of the land.
In other words, all of creation is in view.

In the end we will see that God had vowed to save his people.
Therefore he must offer something of greater value than humanity.
God had vowed to redeem creation.
Therefore he must offer something of greater value than all creation!

There are four basic sections in the chapter:

1. The Valuation of Persons (v1-8)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, If anyone makes a special vow to the LORD involving the valuation of persons, then the valuation of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old shall be fifty shekels^[a] of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. If the person is a female, the valuation shall be thirty shekels. If the person is from five years old up to twenty years old, the valuation shall be for a male twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels. If the person is from a month old up to five years old, the valuation shall be for a male five shekels of silver, and for a female the valuation shall be three shekels of silver. And if the person is sixty years old or over, then the valuation for a male shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. And if someone is too poor to pay the valuation, then he shall be made to stand before the priest, and the priest shall value him; the priest shall value him according to what the vower can afford."

Other ancient peoples allowed dedication by sacrifice and prostitution—
both of which were forbidden by God—
but it was still possible to devote someone or something to the service of God.
Hannah, for instance, vowed to devote her son to the LORD,
and Samuel spent his entire life in the service of Yahweh.

But what if you desired to redeem the person thus devoted?
God sets forth a cash payment that could be substituted for the devoted person.
A man between the age of 20-60 is valued at 50 shekels, a woman at 30 shekels.
From ages 5-20, 20 and 10
before age 5, 5 and 3
after age 60, 15 and 10
The specified monetary payments are related
to the amount of work that a person could be expected to perform.

Young children often died before reaching adulthood –
so before the age of 5, they are very cheap.
By the time you reach the age of 5, you are likely to make it to adulthood,
so the value more than triples.

But you will notice that this is very generic.
A crippled 30 year old man is still valued at the same rate
as a strong healthy 30 year old man.

And yet, verse 8 makes it clear that the value was not absolute.
A poor person must stand before the priest,
and the priest would value him according to what the vower could afford.
God's mercy extends to all!

2. The Valuation of Animals (v9-13)

⁹ “If the vow^b is an animal that may be offered as an offering to the LORD, all of it that he gives to the LORD is holy. ¹⁰ He shall not exchange it or make a substitute for it, good for bad, or bad for good; and if he does in fact substitute one animal for another, then both it and the substitute shall be holy. ¹¹ And if it is any unclean animal that may not be offered as an offering to the LORD, then he shall stand the animal before the priest, ¹² and the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall be. ¹³ But if he wishes to redeem it, he shall add a fifth to the valuation.

Verses 9-13 then reflect on the valuation of animals.

An animal that could be used as a sacrifice could not be redeemed.
It must be sacrificed.
And verse 10 makes it clear that if he tries to substitute,
then both the original animal and the substitute would be holy,
and therefore belong to the priests.
In other words, he would pay double for his folly.
But an unclean animal (or a clean animal that could not be sacrificed),
would be valued by the priests, and if he desired to redeem it,
he would have to pay an extra 20% beyond the valuation.
Again we see that redemption is costly—beyond the value of that which is redeemed.

As Psalm 49 says, “Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life,
for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice,
that he should live on forever and never see the pit.” (7-9)

3. The Valuation of Houses and Land (v14-24)

¹⁴ “When a man dedicates his house as a holy gift to the LORD, the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand. ¹⁵ And if the donor wishes to redeem his house, he shall add a fifth to the valuation price, and it shall be his.

The same provision is given with respect to a house.

If you dedicated your house as a holy gift to the Lord,

then the only way to redeem it would be to add a fifth of its value.

A dedicated house would be used in the service of the priests.

¹⁶ “If a man dedicates to the LORD part of the land that is his possession, then the valuation shall be in proportion to its seed. A homer^[c] of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver.

¹⁷ If he dedicates his field from the year of jubilee, the valuation shall stand, ¹⁸ but if he dedicates his field after the jubilee, then the priest shall calculate the price according to the years that remain until the year of jubilee, and a deduction shall be made from the valuation. ¹⁹ And if he who dedicates the field wishes to redeem it, then he shall add a fifth to its valuation price, and it shall remain his. ²⁰ But if he does not wish to redeem the field, or if he has sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed anymore. ²¹ But the field, when it is released in the jubilee, shall be a holy gift to the LORD, like a field that has been devoted. The priest shall be in possession of it. ²² If he dedicates to the LORD a field that he has bought, which is not a part of his possession, ²³ then the priest shall calculate the amount of the valuation for it up to the year of jubilee, and the man shall give the valuation on that day as a holy gift to the LORD. ²⁴ In the year of jubilee the field shall return to him from whom it was bought, to whom the land belongs as a possession.

Likewise, a man could dedicate a part of his property to the LORD,
which would mean that all of its produce would be given to the priests.

But since the land could not be permanently alienated,
it must be restored at the Jubilee –
therefore the valuation was based on the number of harvests
before the next Jubilee.

And if he wished to redeem the field,
the owner would have to pay an extra fifth beyond its remaining value.
Verses 20-21 makes it clear, however, that if the man does not wish to redeem the land
at the Jubilee, then the land would remain the permanent possession of the priests.
Verse 23 adds that if a man dedicated a field that was not part of his inheritance
(for instance a field that he had “rented” until the next Jubilee)
then he must pay the valuation, since he did not have the authority
to permanently cede it to the priests.

(Think about how that works!

Without this provision, I buy a field and then soon before the Jubilee,
I dedicate it to the LORD – which would alienate it from the original owner!
That’s why God says no way!
If you dedicate someone else’s field that you temporarily control –
then you *must* redeem it!
You may not use God’s law to defraud someone else!

Leviticus 27 is very much in view in Mark 7:9-13,
where Jesus condemns the Pharisees
for allowing people to get out of their filial obligations to their parents
by devoting their property to God.

The mechanism was easy.

Devote the land to God – and forego the profits from it for a time –
but then redeem the land after your parents die,
(because every year brings you closer to the Jubilee –
and thus lowers the cost of redemption!)

NO!

You may not use the Law of God to defraud others!

4. Exceptional Cases (v25-33)

a. The Standard Shekel (v25)

²⁵ Every valuation shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs^[d] shall make a shekel.

Verse 25 gives the basic standard for valuation – the “shekel of the sanctuary” –
since there would be lots of different coinage.

While the shekel of the sanctuary might change over time –
at least at any given time, there would be a common standard!

Verses 26-33 then give particular rules for exceptional cases.

b. The Firstborn (v26-27)

²⁶ “But a firstborn of animals, which as a firstborn belongs to the LORD, no man may dedicate; whether ox or sheep, it is the LORD’s. ²⁷ And if it is an unclean animal, then he shall buy it back at the valuation, and add a fifth to it; or, if it is not redeemed, it shall be sold at the valuation.

The firstborn of animals can neither be dedicated nor redeemed, but must be sacrificed
Exodus 13 had said that all the firstborn of every animal belonged to God.

You cannot dedicate to the Lord that which already belongs to him!
But the firstborn of an unclean animal could either be redeemed at a 20% addition,
or sold by the priests for its valuation.

You might wonder, what about the firstborn child?

That will be dealt with in Numbers 3 – where the Levites were set apart
in place of the firstborn males of the people of Israel.
The Levites belong to the LORD – he is their inheritance.

This is why we now talk about the “general office” of the believer –
because *all of God’s people* are priests.
We all enter into the heavenly holy of holies in and with Jesus!

c. Devoted Things (v28-29)

²⁸ “But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the LORD, of anything that he has, whether man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD. ²⁹ No one devoted, who is to be devoted for destruction^[e] from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.

But nothing devoted can be redeemed. (28-29).

There is a difference between dedicating and devoting.

To dedicate is to offer as a gift for the usage of the priests.

To devote is to dedicate directly to God by destroying a thing.

Therefore anything *devoted* to God is “most holy to the LORD.”

It must therefore be destroyed.

If a person or animal is devoted to God, then it shall be put to death.

If a house or building is devoted to God, then it must be destroyed.

This is the first usage of the Hebrew word “herem”—to devote to destruction

God will command Israel to devote Jericho to destruction.

Not only the people, but the animals, and the buildings.

Jericho is the firstfruits of their warfare, and must be devoted entirely to God.

The gold and silver from the city must be given to the priests. (Joshua 6-7)

Saul’s final rebellion, which wrenches the kingdom from him,

was when he allowed the people to take plunder from the Amalekites,
which God had explicitly commanded to be devoted to destruction. (1 Sam 15)

That which is devoted to God is wrenched “out from the world of human possession”

and returned to the true owner and giver of life. (Radner, 284)

d. Tithes (v30-33)

³⁰ “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD’s; it is holy to the LORD. ³¹ If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. ³² And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman’s staff, shall be holy to the LORD. ³³ One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.”

Verses 30-33 then speaks of the redemption of tithes.

Not only would you tithe a tenth of your produce each year,

but a tenth of your flocks and herds would be given to God—each year.

The common practice was to have the animals pass through a narrow place,

and every tenth animal that passed under the herdsman’s staff would be the tithe.

It would be tempting to “fix” the system

to ensure that weak or sickly animals were the tithe,

but Israel is strictly commanded not to substitute
—and if they do, then both animals would be holy,
and neither could be redeemed.

5. Conclusion (v34)

³⁴ *These are the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.*

God is teaching his people that vows are costly.

We have seen in Leviticus that the spoken word is powerful.
A curse proclaimed against a deaf man is especially wicked
because he cannot defend himself against it,
any more than a blind man can defend himself against a stumbling block (19:14).
Even so, vows are powerful.
They can take on a life of their own.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 says:

“If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it,
for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin.
But if you refrain from vowed, you will not be guilty of sin.
You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips,
for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God
what you have promised with your mouth.”

There are two ways you could take this.

You could say, “well in that case, I won’t vow at all,” because then I’ll be safe!
But that misses the point of vows.

Deuteronomy 23 is not just talking about speech that take the form of vows,
but of all promises that come forth from your mouth.

Jesus corrects the error of the Pharisees in Matthew 5.
“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old,
‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’
But I say to you, ‘Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,
or by the earth, for it is his footstool,
or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King....
Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’;
anything more than this comes from the evil one.”

You don’t need to add lots of flowery speech for your word to take the form of a vow.

When you tell your friend, “I will do it,”
you have vowed to the Lord.

In other words, your ordinary verbal commitments are to be treated like vows.

If you say that you will do something,
you are bound to do it.

And if you fail to do that which you said,

then you have sinned.

And redeeming your vows is costly.

But the point of Leviticus 27 is to show Israel the importance of one's word.

And there is no greater example of this than the cross.

God had promised to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation."

He had promised Eve that her seed would crush the head of the serpent.

But redemption costs more than the value of the one who was vowed.

How can humanity be redeemed?

Only a sacrifice greater than humanity could pay for humanity.

And so we see the mystery of the incarnation:

it had to be a man who paid for man's sins,

but only God could pay the price.

Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ had to be fully God and fully man.

He has fulfilled his Word—he has redeemed his vow,
so that we might not be devoted to utter destruction.

Therefore, as those who are in Christ,
we share both in his suffering and glory.

The whole of the Christian life is to be lived as "living sacrifices" to God.

Leviticus 27 shows us how sacrifice is the way of life.

The call to holiness is – at its root, a call to friendship with God.

After all, the vow offering is the one offering in Leviticus that is entirely free.

You are never required to vow.

And this is why, when the New Testament uses the language of "offering" and "sacrifice"
as something that we do as Christians –
it is almost always in this sense of the vow offering.

Paul says "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" in Romans 12:1
He's saying, present your bodies as a vow offering to God.

Or, as Irenaeus put it in the second century:

"We have given nothing to him previously, nor does he desire anything from us, as if he stood in need of it; but we do stand in need of fellowship with him. And for this reason it was that he graciously poured himself out, that he might gather us into the bosom of the Father....

And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed times, the word of God granting them

resurrection to the glory of God.” (Against Heresies 5.2.1-2 in Radner, 285)

The whole of creation is brought into friendship with God through the offering of Christ Jesus.
Therefore, let us offer ourselves to him – freely!

As we saw at the beginning of Leviticus,
you cannot give to God the “leftovers”!
Whatever is first in your life will receive the first of your time and resources!
For some people, family comes first.
And it shows in how they organize everything around family!

The point of sacrifice – the point of the offerings of Leviticus 1-7
was to deal with sin and establish communion with God.

Now at the end of Leviticus we see once more,
there is an economic aspect of dealing with sin.
Holiness requires economic sacrifice.
You may not be able to maintain the standard of living you desire.
If you belong to God, then all that you have belongs to him as well.

But God’s purpose is to bring all creation back into friendship with himself!
And all that you are – and all that you have – are to be devoted to that end!