

# He Is Our Meat and Drink Indeed

## Perfect Sacrifices and the Perfect Food

<sup>ESV</sup> Leviticus 22:1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>2</sup> "Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> Say to them, 'If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> None of the offspring of Aaron who has a leprous disease or a discharge may eat of the holy things until he is clean. Whoever touches anything that is unclean through contact with the dead or a man who has had an emission of semen,

<sup>5</sup> and whoever touches a swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or a person from whom he may take uncleanness, whatever his uncleanness may be--

<sup>6</sup> the person who touches such a thing shall be unclean until the evening and shall not eat of the holy things unless he has bathed his body in water.

<sup>7</sup> When the sun goes down he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holy things, because they are his food.

<sup>8</sup> He shall not eat what dies of itself or is torn by beasts, and so make himself unclean by it: I am the LORD.'

<sup>9</sup> They shall therefore keep my charge, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby when they profane it: I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

<sup>10</sup> "A lay person shall not eat of a holy thing; no foreign guest of the priest or hired worker shall eat of a holy thing,

<sup>11</sup> but if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food.

<sup>12</sup> If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the contribution of the holy things.

<sup>13</sup> But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced and has no child and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no lay person shall eat of it.

<sup>14</sup> And if anyone eats of a holy thing unintentionally, he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest.

<sup>15</sup> They shall not profane the holy things of the people of Israel, which they contribute to the LORD,

<sup>16</sup> and so cause them to bear iniquity and guilt, by eating their holy things: for I am the LORD who sanctifies them."

<sup>17</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>18</sup> "Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of the house of Israel or of the sojourners in Israel presents a burnt offering as his offering, for any of their vows or freewill offerings that they offer to the LORD,

<sup>19</sup> if it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats.

<sup>20</sup> You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you.

<sup>21</sup> And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it.

<sup>22</sup> Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the LORD or give them to the LORD as a food offering on the altar.

<sup>23</sup> You may present a bull or a lamb that has a part too long or too short for a freewill offering, but for a vow offering it cannot be accepted.

<sup>24</sup> Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut you shall not offer to the LORD; you shall not do it within your land,

<sup>25</sup> neither shall you offer as the bread of your God any such animals gotten from a foreigner. Since there is a blemish in them, because of their mutilation, they will not be accepted for you."

<sup>26</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>27</sup> "When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD.

<sup>28</sup> But you shall not kill an ox or a sheep and her young in one day.

<sup>29</sup> And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted.

<sup>30</sup> It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall leave none of it until morning: I am the LORD.

<sup>31</sup> "So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD.

<sup>32</sup> And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you,

<sup>33</sup> who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD.

(Lev 22:1-33)

---

## An Unknown Commentary on Leviticus 22

A professor of sacred music at a well-known university has a piece on one of Martin Luther's better known songs where he asks us to,

Imagine yourself in worship with Martin Luther (1483-1546) on Easter Sunday in the late 1520s, just a few years after he had posted his famous Ninety-Five Theses on the church door at Wittenburg.

Luther had prepared revisions of the Mass [reformation was a long process] in 1523 (*Formulae Missae*) and 1526 (*Deutsche Messe*). Only a decade earlier, the entire Mass was

said in Latin. Now the Mass was bilingual—Latin and German. Before the Reformation only the choir sang, but now you were singing new hymns in the liturgy as well. Imagine hearing the Scriptures in your vernacular language when before you only heard the Bible read in Latin. Such is the historical and liturgical context of “Christ lag in Todesbanden” (“Christ lay in the bands of death”), the German title of our hymn.

Sitting in Luther’s church, you might have vaguely recognized the melody as a Latin chant sung at Easter, “Victimae paschali laudes.” Johann Walther (1496-1570) adapted it and published it in *Geistliches Gesangbüchlein* (*Spiritual Songbook*) in 1524. Subsequently, this became one of the most popular tunes of the Reformation ... The arrangement by J.S. Bach (1685-1750) in the *UM Hymnal* was not published for another 200 years. The original version had seven stanzas and appeared first in *Enchiridion* (1524). Richard Massie (1800-1887) provided an English translation of all seven German stanzas in Martin Luther’s *Spiritual Songs* (1854) ... The shortening of the hymn to four stanzas in English took place later in the 19th century in the *Church of England Hymn Book*.

The hymn captures the essence of the classic struggle between life and death. The resurrection represents the apex of this battle. With Christ’s rising from the grave, the “strong bands” of death were broken.

Stanza two talks about a “strange and dreadful strife” between the powers of life and death. But the victory went to life when death was “stripped of power.” The sting of death (I Corinthians 15:56) “is lost forever.”

The third stanza is one of rejoicing because “Christ is himself the joy of all.” “The Sun” [a pun in English but not in German] both warms and lights us. “The night of sin is ended.”

The final stanza would have been seen in light of the Eucharist with a reference that contrasts the “true bread of heaven” with the “old and wicked leaven,” an allusion perhaps to the unleavened bread used by Jews under the old covenant. The reference to the Eucharist is even stronger as the hymn closes:

*Christ alone our souls will feed;  
he is our meat and drink indeed;  
faith lives upon no other! Alleluia!<sup>1</sup>*

The reason I’m beginning the sermon with a little history of this song is because I think Luther may have captured the essence of Leviticus 22 better than just about anyone, and I’m not even sure he knew it.

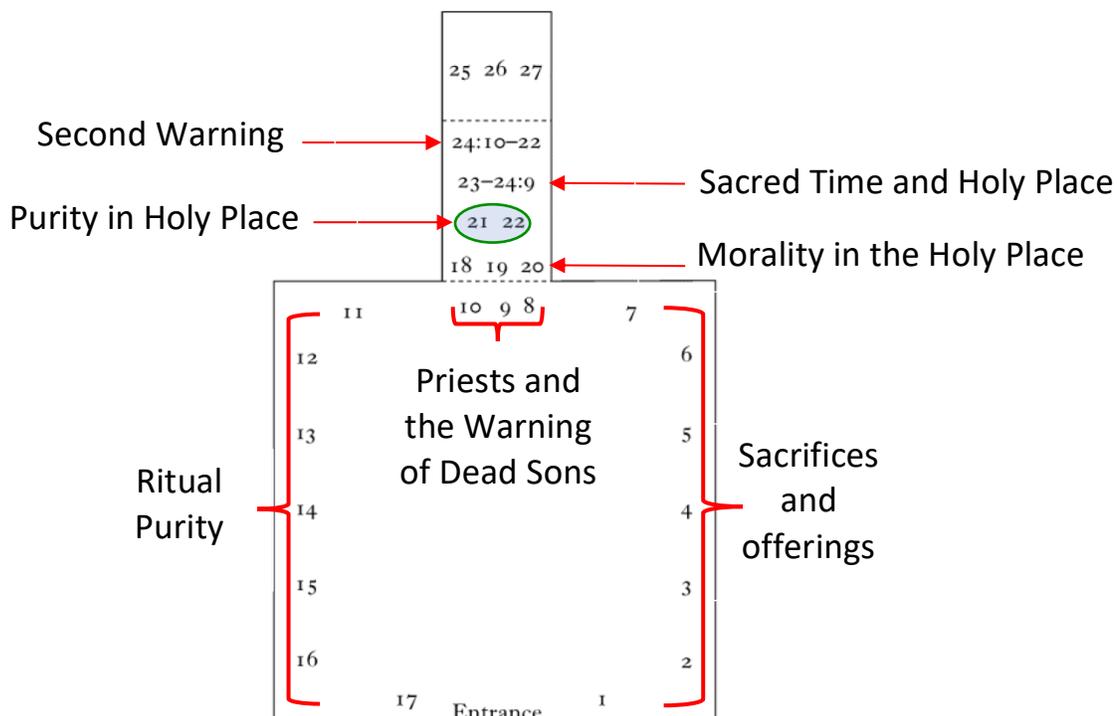
---

<sup>1</sup> C. Michael Hawn, “History of Hymns: ‘Death’s Strong Bands’ Beaten in Luther Hymn” [umcdiscipleship.org](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-deaths-strong-bands-beaten-in-luther-hymn) (May 21, 2013), <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-deaths-strong-bands-beaten-in-luther-hymn>.

# Leviticus 22

Leviticus 22 is really a **continuation of Leviticus 21**. In our explanation that Leviticus is patterned after the tabernacle, these 2 chapters take us further into the holy place, a thing that began in chapter 18. We crossed the threshold of the holy place in 18:1. For three chapters (**18-20**), Israel had explained to them what kind of people should they be, morally speaking. Their morality must comport with the holy place they have entered into.

Now, chs. **21-22** explain **the ceremonial purity** that must be present as the priest does his work near the holy items of the holy place (see **24:2-8** on the holy place). If the previous chapters dealt with the *what* question of morality, these deal with the **how question of purity**. How must a priest approach God's holy things? After this, there is a chapter (**23**) dealing with the **“when” question of sacred time**. And this is concluded with a chapter (**24**) talking about the tabernacle itself, along with **a warning** that acts as the second screen that keeps us from penetrating into the Holy of Holies.



In chapter 21, we saw that there were **laws about the priests and the high priest** and that these laws dealt with purity surrounding **death, marriage, and deformations** of bodies. This all fits nicely with the main idea found throughout Leviticus that holiness is pictured for the people of God through **life, purity, and wholeness**. Chapter 22 picks up by further addressing the topic of eating that was introduced in the previous chapter. What are the **impediments to eating priestly food**? It then moves to the **rights of relatives concerning priestly food**. Finally, it turns to **blemishes in sacrificial animals** which very closely

parallels the blemishes in the priests from the previous chapters.

1. *Impediments to Eating Priestly Food (1–9)*
2. *Relatives' Rights to Priestly Food (10–16)*
3. *Blemishes in Sacrificial Animals (17–30)*<sup>2</sup>

### *Impediments to Eating Priestly Food (Lev 22:1-9)*

At the end of chapter 21, we saw 12 permanent physical impairments that prevented a son of Aaron from serving as fully functioning priests. Wrapped up in the physical deformities was a discussion about the priest eating the Lord's food. He was not permitted to approach to offer the bread of his God (Lev 21:17). This refers to the offering of a sacrificial animal or the sacrificial grain that was then to be eaten by the priest rather than burned with fire. Guilt offerings, peace offerings, thanksgiving, vow, freewill, wave, and grain offerings were especially to be eaten by the priests (Lev 2:10; 6:16, 23; 7:6; 15-16; 8:31; etc.). In this, they understood themselves to be eating with God himself,

---

<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 295.

as the LORD refers to these as **his food offerings** (cf. **6:18; 21:17**; etc.).

**Why were they to eat it?** Obviously, it symbolized **man's close communion** to God and that is a very important symbol—having fellowship at a meal with God himself. This is what I believe Abraham had when he ate bread and wine with Melchizedek (**Gen 14:18**), or when he killed the fatted calf when the Angel of the LORD showed up to his house (**Gen 18:1ff**), or when the 70 elders of Israel along with Moses and Aaron and his sons went up onto Mt. Sinai and beheld God and ate and drank (**Ex 24:11**).

But there's another **more practical reason** too. The Levites were all unique among all the tribes in this way: God would not allow the Levites to **inherit any of the land**. The twelve tribes that inherited land did not include the Levites, but rather Joseph's two sons took their place. This meant that the Levite was not to be working the land. This meant that he had **no sustainable way of getting food** from the land. Therefore, along with the tithes, these food offerings served as the income of the priests. But because they were eating with God and eating of God's very food, there had to be strict regulations in place.

Chapter 22 now begins by looking at **temporary physical causes of impurities** that keep **non-defective priests** from performing their duties and especially from eating the holy food, lest they contaminate the holy things. As usual, the chapter begins, “**And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying...**” (**Lev 22:1**). Christ tells Moses to “**speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD**” (2).

The Hebrew here is unusual and the ESV is hard for me to understand. What are these “holy things?” Do they belong to Aaron or to the people? The context explains that the “**holy things of the people of Israel**” refers to their **sacrifices and offerings** that are brought into the sanctuary. And then it clearly talks about priestly impurities that keep them from eating the sacred food. So I find a more helpful translation to be, “**Instruct Aaron and his sons to be scrupulous concerning the sacred donations that the Israelites consecrate to me so they do not desecrate my holy name.**”<sup>3</sup> They have to be very careful about their own ritual contamination because God’s Name is at stake. He is

---

<sup>3</sup> **Jacob Milgrom**, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1844.

Yahweh (the verse ends, as do several in the chapter, this way).

In what ways are they to be scrupulous? In the laws that follow. “The first rule is that impure priests may not come into contact with sacred donations.”<sup>4</sup> “Say to them, ‘if any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD’” (3). The priest must stay away until the time of his uncleanness is over (i.e. evening, etc.).

What kind of uncleanness? It lists six examples,<sup>5</sup> “None of the offspring of Aaron who has a leprous disease or a discharge may eat of the holy things until he is clean. Whoever touches anything that is unclean through contact with the dead or a man who had had an emission of semen, and whoever touches a swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or a person from whom he may take uncleanness, whatever his uncleanness may be—” (4-5). We’ve seen these things before (skin diseases cf. chs. 13–14; discharges cf. ch. 15; swarming things cf. ch. 11), which is

---

<sup>4</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 147.

<sup>5</sup> Six is an appropriate number for things that make someone imperfect and unwhole.

part of why it is important to see that Leviticus is turning around, returning to things already spoken as it begins to apply the laws of the courtyard to increasingly holy space.

Then, just like before (especially ch. 15), we find that this kind of uncleanness, once removed, has a **time limit** (evening) and a **requirement** (OT baptism, i.e. bathing his body in water; **vs. 6**). “**When the sun goes down he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holy things, because they are his food**” (7).

After the priest’s physical requirements are taken care of, the law turns to the **requirements of the animal**. “**He shall not eat what dies of itself or is torn by beasts, and so make himself unclean by it: I am the LORD**” (8). “**Priests are held to a higher standard than laypersons, who are permitted to incur minor impurity by eating such an animal (17:15).**”<sup>6</sup> In this way, “**They shall therefore keep my charge, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby when they profane it: I am the LORD who sanctifies them**” (9). The sin here becomes a **moral** problem when the priest disobeys or is negligent of his duties to be scrupulous about the holy things, which are not moral but ritualistic in nature. In this way, the ritual or

---

<sup>6</sup> **Roy Gane**, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 381.

religious precedes the moral category. And it ought to be a **warning** to those who even today wish to not be scrupulous with God's worship, for when they deal with holy things and treat them as common and profane, a moral problem always rises to take its place. To a large extent, I believe this explains much about why the church in our day is so weak. When we neglect the worship of the holy God and treating it as God wishes, we end up making ourselves morally unclean and this in turn leads to a host of other moral sins that follow from the root.

### *Relatives Rights to Priestly Food (Lev 22:10-16)*

The law now moves to consider the **relatives of the priests**. Why? The topic remains the same—the **LORD's food**. Wenham clarifies, “**As a matter of course, the priests' families also ate the holy things. But who counted as belonging to the priest's family? This paragraph explains.**”<sup>7</sup> It begins, “**A lay person shall not eat of a holy thing...**” (10). This lay person has to be the priest's family, since that is the context. The priest's wife or his son not yet old enough to

---

<sup>7</sup> Wenham, 294.

serve would be among several who are included under this title.

Those excluded include a **foreign guest** in his house or a **hired worker** (10). Even though employed or staying in their home, they are not permitted to eat the holy food. It is for the priest and his family alone. Curiously, “**if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food**” (11). **The slave is considered part of the priest’s family!** This tells you how God wanted slaves to be treated in Israel.

If a **priest’s daughter** marries a **layman**, she cannot eat of the contribution of the holy things (12). However, if she is widowed or divorced and has no child and returns to her father’s house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father’s food. But under no circumstances may a lay person eat of it (13).

If someone were to eat of it **unintentionally**, for example they were not told that this food was offered as a sacrifice but thought it was just an ordinary meal, “**he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest**” (14). Why? Because it belonged to the priest and this would be a kind of theft. It wasn’t the death penalty or anything. Nevertheless, there were consequences even for

unintentional sin, as we have also seen earlier in the book (**Lev 4:2**, etc.).

**Vv. 15-16** appears to be a **warning to the priests**. The ESV reads, “They shall not profane the holy things of the people of Israel, which they contribute to the LORD, and so cause them to bear iniquity and guilt, by eating of their holy things: for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” Like vs. 2, this translation is puzzling to me. I like Milgrom’s translation much better. “They (the priests) shall not desecrate the sacred donations of the Israelites that they set aside for YHWH <sup>16</sup>by causing them (the Israelites) to bear the penalty of reparation when they (the Israelites) eat their (own) sacred donations; for it is I YHWH who sanctifies them (the priests).”<sup>8</sup> What’s the point? Levine explains one possible abuse, “The priests, responsible for maintaining proper storage and accurate accounting procedures, were to police themselves in order to prevent priests, who might be so tempted, from dealing in sacred donations to their own advantage. Such individuals would have to be punished appropriately.”<sup>9</sup> God is ensuring that the **lay people are looked after** by the priests in this important matter.

---

<sup>8</sup> Milgrom, 1844.

<sup>9</sup> Levine, 150.

## *Blemishes in Sacrificial Animals (Lev 22:17-30)*

The third and final section begins like vs. 1, “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons ...’” (17-18a). But now it adds, “... and all the people of Israel.” The focus turns to the animals. It first talks about a burnt offering or a freewill offering (18). Then it adds a peace offering (21). God will only accept it if it is “a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats” (19-20). We’ve seen this before (1:3, etc.). But this time the focus is on the kinds of blemishes.

It gives a list of about 8 examples. These include blind, disabled, mutilated, having a discharge, an itch, scabs (22), crushed or bruised or torn or cut testicles (24), or animals that you got from a foreigner (25). Each of these in their own way is a symbol of death and decay, of things gone wrong, and there must not be any of this in the LORD’s food. Testicles seems to be especially emphasized, because this is where the life is stored. And though the foreign animal might seem out of place, it explains, “Since there is a blemish in them, because of their mutilation, they will not be accepted for you” (25). This seems to refer to castration, which the Israelites would

not do. It is all summarized in vs. 21, “It must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it.”

The chapter comes to a conclusion with the third use of our introductory formula, “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying ...” (26). It now turns to consider timelines for sacrificial animals. For example, “When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD.” I’ll talk about the eighth day in a moment.

It continues, “You shall not kill an ox or a sheep and her young in one day” (28). Then another one, “And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted” (29), meaning, “It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall leave none of it until morning: I am the LORD” (30).<sup>10</sup> Wenham has a good summary of the purpose of these laws,

More than mere sentimentality seems to underlie this law. It is in conformity with other laws such as that forbidding men to take a bird and its eggs (Deut. 22:6–7), or to cook a kid in its mother’s milk (Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 14:21), or

---

<sup>10</sup> Note how ch. 21 ends with food and blemishes and this picks up in ch. 22. Note here how the end of 22 ends with timing laws and this picks up in earnest in chapter 23.

wantonly to destroy trees (Deut. 20:19–20). Noah was commissioned to gather a pair of each kind of animal to preserve life from the all-destroying flood (Gen. 6:19–20; 7:2–3). Every Israelite was expected to do his part in conservation by avoiding wanton destruction of the God-given creation.<sup>11</sup>

Why would this come up here? Because wanton destruction of life or unlawful taking of life, even animal life, is a perversion of the order God built into this universe. We are **stewards of God's creation**, and his sacrificial system at every turn preserves that order by avoiding death, decay, and destruction of his creation.

In this way, I think we touch upon **moral** law here as well, which might explain the ending which tells them this is how they will **keep his commandments** and do them (31), this is how they will not profane his holy Name, so that he might be sanctified among the people of Israel (32), because he **brought them out of the land of Egypt** to be their God (33). This harkening back to Egypt recalls the **Ten Commandments** again, as do the three endings, “**I am the LORD,**” “**I am the LORD who sanctifies you,**” and “**I am the LORD**” in those three verses.

---

<sup>11</sup> **Wenham**, 296.

## Leviticus 22 and the New Covenant

I want to turn now to how we should think about this chapter **in light of the new covenant**. I want to use Luther's song as a sounding board. As we think about the different sections of law in Leviticus 22, the first thing we come upon is that the priest is not allowed to participate in the holy food, the food of God, if he is in a state of **uncleanness**.

As I said earlier, the original song had **seven stanzas**. All seven were translated into English back in 1854. Our hymnal has only five of them. In one of the missing stanzas we sing,

*No man from Death could victory win,  
O'er all mankind he reigned;  
Alas! That cometh of our sin,  
There was not one unstained:  
Wherefore Death in triumph came,  
And over us a right did claim;  
He held us all in thralldom [slavery].  
Hallelujah!*

“There was not one unstained.” This stain comes from our sin and through it, we were helpless against the specter of Death.

Now, Leviticus is concerned with outward uncleanness at this point, though we have seen, especially in chs. 16-20 that it is also concerned with inward, moral uncleanness. There’s an interesting predecessor to this way back with Noah. In a badly misunderstood verse, we read that Noah was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (Gen 6:9 ESV). “Righteous” is a word that refers to his morality. Noah followed and walked with God.

But some have read “blameless” this way as well. For example, “If nobody is perfect why does scripture say Noah was a perfect man? See Genesis 6:9.”<sup>12</sup> This author of a book called *Yes We Can Be Perfect In Our Generation* is citing the KJV and other translations which render “blameless” as “perfect.” In fact, the word for “blameless” is used twice in Leviticus 22, where it refers not to moral perfection, but physical perfection. “If it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish (*tammim*), of the bulls or the sheep or

---

<sup>12</sup> Betty Champion, *Yes We Can Be Perfect In Our Generation* (LaGrange, GA: World Overcomer’s Church Int., 2002), 119.

the goats ... to be accepted it must be perfect (*tammim*); there shall be no blemish in it” (Lev 22:19, 21).

I would argue that Genesis 6 is not saying that Noah is without sin and that’s why God chose him. No, in fact, it says Noah found “**grace**” or “**favor**” in the eyes of the LORD (6:8). Perfect men don’t need grace, but rather justice. Instead, I believe it is saying that Noah was not physically blemished. The word is generations (plural), not generation (singular). It is referring to his lineage, his generations. Specifically, he was **not tainted with angelic blood**, and this becomes a major reason why the Genesis 6 “sons of God” and Nephilim story is just a few verses earlier. This is precisely how they read it in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In a book called the Genesis Apocryphon we read about Lamech, the father of Noah who sees the birth of his son and that he looks more like an angel than a man. Being frightened, he turns to his wife (Bitenosh) and makes her swear that he is the father. She responds,

Remember my pleasure ... the time of love, the gasping of my breath in my breast ... I swear to you by the Great Holy One, by the King of the heavens ... that this seed comes from you, that this pregnancy comes from you, that the planting

of this fruit comes from you, and not from any foreigner or watcher or son of heaven.

(GenAp 2)

Both ideas, a moral righteousness (though not perfection) and a physical purity seem to be imbedded in the statement about Noah. But you must remember that **Noah is a type of Christ**. So also are the sacrificial animals of Leviticus 22. Consider just a couple of verses about Jesus in this regard.

As it describes **moral purity** Hebrews tells us, “**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin**” (**Heb 4:15**). Peter likewise says, “**He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth**” (**1Pe 2:22**). This actually comes from Isaiah 53, the most famous of all the Suffering Servant passages. It says, “**He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth**” (**Isa 53:9**), or in the LXX, “**... he practiced no iniquity.**” He did not sin. Luther’s song implies that Jesus was without sin when it tells us directly that we are all stained, but Jesus “**lay awhile in Death’s strong bands, for our offences given.**” He was the sacrificial lamb of God.

Earlier, Peter had commented on the **physical purity** in language that comes straight out of Leviticus 22, in a chapter that is formed around Leviticus 11 and the chapter that talks about defiling yourself with unclean critters.<sup>13</sup> He said, “You were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1Pe 1:18-19). Hebrews likewise says, this. “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God ...” (Heb 9:14).

This is why Jesus is called by John the Baptist, “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; 36). This is why the Apostle John sees in his vision of heaven, “between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders ... a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). This was the prediction in Isaiah 53. “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33). I happened to cite this from Acts 8 where we saw last week that this was in the story of the **Ethiopian Eunuch**

---

<sup>13</sup> See the fascinating chiasm by **Josh Palmer**, “Leviticus 11 and 1 Peter,” *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Nov 12, 2015), at <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2015/11/12/leviticus-11-and-1peter/>.

who was reading about this very thing and when he was finally done reading the scroll then asked to be baptized (36), after Philip “Opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (35).

Now, there’s something about the power of Christ that I want to point out here and it has to do with the length of days to wait before sacrificing an animal. It says, “When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD” (Lev 22:27). We’ve seen the “eighth day” several times in Leviticus (Lev 9:1; 12:3; 14:10; etc.). But this is a number we find in other places as well. Circumcision was an eighth day rite (Gen 17:12), as was the priest’s ordination (Lev 9:1). In Exodus, the parallel to our law says, “Seven days it shall be with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me” (Ex 22:30).

Each of these, I would argue, falls in line with a theology implicit in the “eighth” or the “octave” as we read it in the psalms. It is a theology of fullness and completion but better. Sunday, Monday, Tuesdays, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday ... Sunday. Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti ... Do. It’s a second, new Sunday, a second, new Do. In the New Testament, this talked about as the “first day of the week,”

the day of Resurrection. But this first day is really the eighth day from the moment he rode into Jerusalem on the donkey.

The **resurrection** of Jesus is the reason why there is power in his death. It is because he is no longer dead that his death is greater than all other sacrificial deaths. “**Christ Jesus lay in Death’s strong bands, for our offences given ... But now at God’s right hand He stands, and brings us life from heaven.**”

*It was a strange and dreadful strife,  
When Life and Death contended;  
The victory remained with Life,  
The reign of Death was ended:  
Holy Scripture plainly saith,  
That Death is swallowed up by Death,  
Made henceforth a derision.  
Hallelujah!*

This takes me to **the last main idea of our chapter** that is also found in the song: **Food**. Luther refers to Jesus as “**the true Paschal Lamb we see, whom God so freely gave us.**” This is John’s “Lamb of God,” and it refers specifically to the Passover, because he writes, “**See! His blood doth mark our**

door, faith points to it, Death passes o'er. The Murderer cannot harm us. Hallelujah!"

Luther is celebrating what I hope every one here today can or will. That **Jesus' sacrificial death as the lamb of God is for you**. That you can say that by faith in Christ alone, Satan cannot harm me, Death no longer has dominion over me. In times like these, frankly, in any time, since we will all die, you want to be able to say this. This is how a person can sing Hallelujah—Praise Jehovah, Praise God, Praise Jesus. It is when they know they are forgiven for all their sins by the blood of Christ through the power of his resurrection. You have to look to this Jesus by faith, trusting that his death on the cross was for you. Pray to the Father and ask him to forgive you. Tell him that you know that Jesus died for you and that he is alive now, having been raised from the dead, so that death will not have power over you again.

But the song of Martin Luther has as its climax—**food**. Not just any food, but eternal, life-giving food. Food is that which you need on a daily basis, not once for all. It is what nourishes you and sustains you through this life. Specifically, he has in mind the Communion, the Lord's Supper:

*So let us keep the festival,  
Whereto the Lord invites us;  
Christ is Himself the joy of all,  
The Sun which warms and lights us;  
By His grace He doth impart  
Eternal sunshine to the heart;  
The night of sin is ended.  
Hallelujah!*

Through the Supper, the Lord invites all who will have Christ to be warmly filled by the Sun of Righteousness who has healing in his wings (**Mal 4:2**). The Son of God will pour the Light of God into your heart and give you Eternal sunshine in your heart, knowing that the night of sin is ended.

This is Luther's next-to-last stanza. His last stanza in the original was meant to be sung on Easter, for it says, "**Then let us feast this Easter-day On the true Bread of heaven.**" But as each Lord's Day is a little celebration of the resurrection, our hymnal changed it to "**Let us feast this joyful day...**" **Feast on what?** On Christ himself.

This is the language of Leviticus 22, because what we are feasting upon is the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. That's the context of the

song and it is the context of Leviticus. Amazingly, all things have come together in this song. The perfect, **spotless Lamb** was offered up to die for our sins by the Perfect **High Priest** who was without sin. He was offered up as a **sin-offering** that we might be forgiven. But all other offerings are also fulfilled in his coming to us. You could not eat a sin offering. But you would eat a **thank offering**, and this is why the Supper is called Eucharist—“*Thanks.*”

In it, we remember what our Lord taught us. “I am the bread that came down from heaven” (**John 6:41**). “I am the bread of life” (**John 6:48**). “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (**49-51**). “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (**53**).

Do you understand, now, the priestly Leviticus 22 language Jesus is talking about? **God is giving you** this wonderful sacrifice that through it you might have atonement. But more, he is giving you the **priestly privilege of eating** that sacrifice that you might have true fellowship

with God. This is what we have symbolized in the bread and wine that when we take it together, we are truly eating with the living Christ himself, having fellowship with him, True Communion, like Abraham and Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel before us.

Hence, our song comes to its great climax by teaching us to eat with Christ, especially when we come together to celebrate all he has done and won for us.

*Then let us feast this Easter-day  
On the true Bread of heaven;  
The Word of grace hath purged away  
The old and wicked leaven:  
Christ alone our souls will feed,  
He is our meat and drink indeed;  
Faith lives upon no other.  
Hallelujah!*

Purging away the old and evil leaven is language of coming to further and greater obedience by the Son whose new life comes into you. This is why Peter takes the language of the Spotless Lamb and continues, “**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness**” (1Pe 2:24). This is the reason

he can say, “It is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1:16-17). This is why Paul says Christ is taking a church, “That he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).

And thus our exhortation, when we leave our sweet communion together with Christ is, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Php 2:14-15).

Hallelujah.

### **Bibliography**

Champion, Betty. *Yes We Can Be Perfect In Our Generation*. LaGrange, GA: World Overcomer’s Church Int., 2002.

Gane, Roy. *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

Hawn, C. Michael. “History of Hymns: ‘Death’s Strong Bands’ Beaten in Luther Hymn.” *Umcdiscipleship.org* (May 21, 2013). <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-deaths-strong-bands-beaten-in-luther-hymn>.

Levine, Baruch A. *Leviticus*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Luther, Martin. "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands" (1524).

Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A. Anchor Yale Bible New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008.

Wenham, Gordon J. *The Book of Leviticus*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979.

## Martin Luther, Christ Lay Awhile In Death's Strong Bands, 1524

- 1 Christ lay awhile in Death's strong bands,  
For our offences given;  
But now at God's right hand He stands,  
And brings us life from heaven:  
Wherefore let us joyful be,  
And sing to God right thankfully  
Loud songs of Hallelujah!  
Hallelujah!
- 2 No man from Death could victory win,  
O'er all mankind he reigned;  
Alas! That cometh of our sin,  
There was not one unstained:  
Wherefore Death in triumph came,  
And over us a right did claim;  
He held us all in thralldom [slavery].  
Hallelujah!
- 3 Christ Jesus, God's own Son, came down,  
That He might us deliver,  
And sin destroying, took his crown  
From Death's pale brows for ever:  
Stript of power, no more he reigns;  
An empty Shape alone remains;  
His sting is lost for ever.  
Hallelujah!
- 4 It was a strange and dreadful strife,  
When Life and Death contended;  
The victory remained with Life,  
The reign of Death was ended:  
Holy Scripture plainly saith,  
That Death is swallowed up by Death,  
Made henceforth a derision.  
Hallelujah!
- 5 Here the true Paschal Lamb we see,  
Whom God so freely gave us;  
He died on the accursed tree  
So strong His love! To save us:  
See! His blood doth mark our door,  
Faith points to it, Death passes o'er,  
The Murderer cannot harm us.  
Hallelujah!
- 6 So let us keep the festival,  
Whereto the Lord invites us;  
Christ is Himself the joy of all,  
The Sun which warms and lights us;  
By His grace He doth impart  
Eternal sunshine to the heart;  
The might of sin is ended.  
Hallelujah!
- 7 Then let us feast this Easter-day  
On the true Bread of heaven;  
The Word of grace hath purged away  
The old and wicked leaven:  
Christ alone our souls will feed,  
He is our meat and drink indeed;  
Faith lives upon no other.  
Hallelujah!