

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Pentateuch II

SHAPING THE ISRAELITE COMMUNITY

WILLIAM A. ANDERSON, DMIN, PHD



Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:
Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Printed with Ecclesiastical Permission and Approved for Private or Instructional Use

Nihil Obstat:
Rev. Msgr. Kevin Michael Quirk, JCD, JV
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:
+ Michael J. Bransfield
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston [West Virginia]
November 17, 2012

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

To order, call 800-325-9521
www.liguori.org

Copyright © 2013 William A. Anderson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data on file with the Library of Congress

p ISBN 978-0-7648-2132-5
e ISBN 978-0-7648-2307-7

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists.
To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America
17 16 15 14 13 / 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition



Contents

Dedication 5

Acknowledgments 7

Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* 9

***Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading) 11**

How to Use This Bible-Study Companion 14

A Process for Sacred Reading 15

Group-study Formats 16

Introduction: Pentateuch II 19

Lesson 1 Ritual of Sacrifice (Leviticus 1—15) 25

Part 1: Group Study (Leviticus 1—3:5) 26

Lesson 2 A Holy People, God's People (Leviticus 16—27) 34

Part 1: Group Study (Leviticus 16) 35

Part 2: Individual Study (Leviticus 17—27) 39

Lesson 3 Grumbling in the Wilderness (Numbers 1—16:34) 46

Part 1: Group Study (Numbers 10:29—12) 48

Part 2: Individual Study (Numbers 13—16:34) 53

NOTE: The length of each Bible section varies. Group leaders should combine sections as needed to fit the number of sessions in their program.

Lesson 4 Encampment in Moab (Numbers 16:35—36:13) 63

Part 1: Group Study (Numbers 16:35—18:7) 64

Part 2: Individual Study (Numbers 20—25) 70

Lesson 5 Moses' First Address (Deuteronomy 1—4:43) 81

Part 1: Group Study (Deuteronomy 1—2:15) 82

Part 2: Individual Study (Deuteronomy 2:16—4:43) 89

Lesson 6 The Great Commandment (Deuteronomy 4:44—11) 98

Part 1: Group Study (Deuteronomy 4:44—6) 99

Part 2: Individual Study (Deuteronomy 7—11) 106

Lesson 7 The Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12—34) 116

Part 1: Group Study (Deuteronomy 12—13) 117

Part 2: Individual Study (Deuteronomy 29—34) 132



Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson except the first also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, a study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 18 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, “The Word became flesh,” not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.

3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy and will realize how these books offer spiritual nourishment. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the authors wrote these three books, they didn't simply link random stories together but placed them in a context to stress a message. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

NOTE: Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, this book is divided into seven lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 7 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers passages from Leviticus 16:1 through 27:34. The study group reads and discusses only Leviticus 16 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on Leviticus 17:1 through 27:34 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the format at the top of page 16. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 16, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into three to six shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety

minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio divina* (see page 11) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 11.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✘ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✘ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✘ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✘ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✘ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✘ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✘ Use a clock or watch.
- ✘ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✘ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Pentateuch II" (page 19) before the first session.
- ✘ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✘ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to Participants

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Read "Introduction: Pentateuch II" (page 19) before the first session.
- ✘ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✘ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance,

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Pentateuch II

Read this overview before the first class.

A young couple decided to read the Bible together for a half-hour every night before going to bed. As they read through Genesis and the first part of Exodus, they marveled at how interesting the stories were and wondered why more people didn't read the Bible. Then they came to the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments in chapter 20 of Exodus. Following the story of the Ten Commandments came a series of chapters about laws. There were laws for treating slaves, for personal injury, for property damage, for worship, for remaining faithful to the covenant, and for fidelity. After this, there were laws concerning materials for building the Ark and materials for worship. Each night, reading the Bible became more difficult as the couple struggled through a series of chapters on regulations and laws that bored and overwhelmed them. Despite the difficulties, they remained faithful and persevered in their reading.

Each morning, as the couple attempted to reflect together on the previous night's readings, they couldn't recall the laws, rituals, and regulations they had read the night before. Finally, the story of the Golden Calf in chapter 32 of Exodus brought relief as they read the story of the people worshiping this idol and the consequences that ensued. They were again enjoying the reading of the Bible. Unfortunately, the narrative portion lasted for only three chapters, and then they again encountered regulations for collecting and using items for worship that continued for the next fourteen chapters. But they were determined to conquer and remain faithful to their commitment to read the Bible every night. They completed the Book of Exodus. Then it happened. They began reading the Book of Leviticus.

They read it for a few nights and soon realized they could not remember or even understand what they had read in the second half of the Book of Exodus. Now they had to endure a full book of laws and rituals. Like many others who reach the Book of Leviticus, they laid the Bible down, never to pick it up again.

The story of the couple's becoming overwhelmed by the boring recital of laws and rituals is a common experience for many. When a man recently asked a noted Scripture scholar what he should read in the Pentateuch, the scholar suggested the man read the narrative sections and skip the laws and rituals found in the first five books. He knew the laws and rituals were important for the Israelite community, but he also knew that most of them were not given on Sinai when Moses received the commandments. A final editor placed them with the Ten Commandments on Sinai to give the laws and rituals more authority.

Who Wrote the Pentateuch?

The Pentateuch is the result of various traditions developed throughout many centuries. Commentators believe the books come from the writings of many authors and editors. Although a number of sources are used in the evolution of the Pentateuch, commentators identify four basic sources, sometimes called "traditions," in the text itself.

1. J (Yahwist tradition). German scholars discovered that one particular tradition in the Pentateuch consisted of a group of writers and editors who used the term *Yahweh* for God. Since the first letter of the term *Yahweh* was a "J" in German, the German scholars referred to the author who used this term for God as "J." The Yahwist author pictures God in a more human and picturesque manner.

2. E (Elohistic tradition). Another source is referred to as the Elohist tradition because the author uses the more formal term of *Elohim* for God. His writings are designated by the letter "E." The author's style is less colorful than that found in the Yahwist author.

3. P (Priestly tradition). A later author or editor wrote about priestly concerns, laws, and rituals contained in the Pentateuch. This author (or

authors and editors) wrote around 550 BC to 450 BC, the period immediately following the Israelites' return from exile in Babylon. The priestly account, designated by the letter "P," contains a number of genealogies and presents its message in a more precise and factual manner than other passages of the Pentateuch. The Priestly author or editor not only added new material to the story, but also mingled some of the stories of the Yahwist author with that of the Elohist author so that it becomes difficult at times to distinguish one source from the other.

4. D (Deuteronomist). The Deuteronomist tradition, referred to as "D," developed from many writings from the eighth to the fifth centuries BC. The D source dominates the last book of the Pentateuch, known as Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy is only part of the Deuteronomist tradition. The D tradition developed over several centuries and is found in other Old Testament writings, such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Jeremiah.

An Important Note About Genealogies and Laws

For readers who are unfamiliar with the meaning behind many of the Israelite laws and rituals, reading them can become tedious, repetitive, boring, and complicated. Many people attempting to study the Bible read as far as the laws, rituals, or genealogies and soon find themselves bogged down with lists of names that mean nothing to them or with laws meant for the daily life of the Jewish community living in Israel.

Genealogies: At times, an editor interrupts the flow of the narrative to introduce a genealogy, which he uses to bind the story together. Although the genealogies help the reader understand the family line of the major figures found in the Pentateuch, they can also distract the reader from the flow of the story. Some names in the genealogies mean nothing to the reader, while others may have a significant role in the history of Israel. In most cases, the genealogies were not part of the original narrative.

Laws and rituals: After struggling with genealogies, many readers have additional difficulty attempting to absorb the laws and rituals that took place within the daily life and worship of the Israelite community. Fol-

lowing a frustrating attempt to understand or recall the laws and rituals, many readers tend to abandon their study of the Bible.

The approach of this study text: This study will follow the advice of the Scripture scholar mentioned in the beginning of this introduction who suggested that the reader scan or skip many of the laws, rituals, and genealogies found in the Books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The reader may get an idea of the laws and genealogies by reading the commentaries found in this text, but the commentaries will not be followed by reflections. The summaries that comment on these sections will be shaded in this text and will not be part of the study discussions unless the study group decides otherwise; they can be scanned or omitted as the group or individual deems necessary.

The Book of Leviticus

The Book of Leviticus gathers the work of many authors who adapted the laws, rituals, feasts, and instructions for living as a good Israelite. Most of the material in the book comes from the Priestly tradition. Although some portions of the material may come from an era earlier than the sixth or fifth century before Christ, the final Priestly editor gathered it around the fifth century before Christ and placed it in its current position in the Pentateuch. The purpose in gathering these laws and rituals may be due to the desire of the Priestly authors to help unify the religious beliefs and practices of the Israelites who have settled among pagan Gentiles. The Book of Leviticus is the least-read book of the Bible, for this book made more sense to the Jewish audience for which it was written, since it told them how to live and worship as good Jews.

In this study, we will select short sections from the Book of Leviticus in the first two lessons for the sake of becoming familiar with the book. It would be wise for the reader to listen to the advice of the scholar and not spend too much time reading the laws and rituals found in every chapter of the book.

The Book of Numbers

The Book of Numbers receives its name from a census (numbering) that takes place twice in the book. However, this does not account for its total content. The book is confusing and difficult to piece together at times, as it presents some short narrative sections, apparently the result of the J and E traditions, and a large portion of legal material that seems to belong to the Book of Leviticus and the P tradition. The book describes the journey from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab that is east of the Jordan River. The laws, rituals, moral teachings, and instructions for worship materials in Leviticus actually continue from the last chapters of the Book of Exodus and into the first ten chapters of the Book of Numbers.

The Book of Deuteronomy

Many refer to Deuteronomy as a “second law,” which is really meant to be an explanation in more detail of the laws given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Hebrew title means, “These are the words of Moses.” The book contains three farewell speeches attributed to Moses in the land of Moab, where the Israelites settled before their invasion of the land the Lord promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the first address (1—4:43), Moses outlines all that has occurred since the Israelites left Sinai. In his second address (4:44—28), Moses explains the commandments further and adds other laws known as the Covenant Code. In his third address (29—33), Moses adds in detail many of the future punishments in store for the Israelites if they do not remain faithful to the covenant. And finally in the last section (34), the author speaks of the death of Moses.

The writing and editing of the Book of Deuteronomy took place from around the eighth to the fifth centuries before Christ. The nucleus of the Book of Deuteronomy apparently developed in the northern kingdom of Israel. Later, some of the Israelites who fled from the north at the time of the Assyrian invasion in 721 BC brought portions of the book to the southern kingdom. In 622 BC, a king of Judea named Josiah was greatly influenced by the discovery of the earlier version of the Book of Deuteronomy. The “book of laws,” as it was called, led Josiah to order the destruction of all images of the false gods, forbid worship of these

gods, and kill the priests who led the worship of these gods. The Book of Deuteronomy is a highly theological book and one that is quoted often in the New Testament.

Although there are several authors and editors within each tradition, this study guide will make use of the singular in referring to a writer or editor within a tradition. For example, the text may read, "This portion of the text comes from the Priestly editor," although several editors or authors may have pieced the work together.

Also, many of the reflections in the *lectio divina* link the Old Testament passages with reflections from the New Testament. As a result of this approach, the reader is able to understand more fully the relationship of the Old Testament to the New. Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).



LESSON 2

A Holy People, God's People

LEVITICUS 16—27

Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD (19:18).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 18)

Context

Part 1: Leviticus 16 On the Day of Atonement, Aaron is to sacrifice a bull for his own purification. He then takes two goats and sacrifices one as a purification sacrifice for the community and sends the other out of the camp to die in the wilderness, symbolically carrying the sins of the people. This goat is known as the scapegoat. Aaron shall wear his linen vestments during this ceremony.

Part 2: Leviticus 17—27 Chapters 17—26 contain the Holiness Code that highlights the role of the Lord as the font of holiness guiding the people. This code also stresses the role of Yahweh as the foundation of the laws that lead the Israelites to becoming a holy people. The refrain “I am the Lord” becomes a key expression in this Holiness Code.

The code concerns the shedding of an animal’s blood outside the entrance to the tent of meeting. Laws for sexual behavior, such as

avoiding sexual intercourse with a close relative, with a woman during her menstrual period, or with an animal are given in this section. The code also deals with social concerns for one's neighbor by not stealing, swearing falsely, acting dishonestly, spreading slander, or not taking revenge. Likewise, it relates the commandment quoted by Jesus, saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18).

The code goes on to explain the holiness of the priesthood and its demands, as well as the celebration of Jewish feasts as holy days. Rules for the sanctuary, the special Sabbath Year (a year of rest for the land), and the Jubilee Year (the fiftieth year) are explained here. The code speaks of the rewards for those who obey the Lord and punishment for those who do not. Finally, the code concludes with rules concerning the redemption of human beings and the land.

Part 2 of this study begins with Chapter 19. Chapters 17—18 contain the first part of the Holiness Code, which may be read, scanned, or skipped. The summary of the Holiness Code given in this context will help in understanding the content of the skipped chapters.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (LEVITICUS 16)

Read aloud Leviticus 16.

16:1–19 The Day of Atonement

The study of this passage offers a sampling of the type of passages found in the Book of Leviticus. In this passage, the Lord instructs Moses on how Aaron should perform certain rituals. Aaron must make a sacrificial offering to God on his own behalf and that of the people. He brings a bull from the herd for sacrifice and a ram as a burnt offering. He must wear his ritual garb but is to avoid all uncleanness. He is instructed to wash himself with water before putting on the sacred clothing. Aaron shall also take two goats with him from the Israelite community as an offering of the people. The bull and the ram will be for his own purification and that of his

household. This need for purification could refer to his two sons who were killed by the fire in the sanctuary because they used an ember in sacrifice that was not holy. He will sacrifice the bull and sprinkle its blood inside the sanctuary, and afterward draw lots for the goats to determine which one will be for the Lord and which one will be for Azazel, the name given for a demon. He will sacrifice the goat chosen to be sacrificed for the Lord and sprinkle its blood before the ark as he did with the blood of the bull. The day, referred to here as a day of atonement, became known as Yom Kippur.

16:20–34 The Scapegoat

After Aaron has finished purifying the sanctuary and the tent of meeting, he leads out the live goat and places two hands on its head to symbolize the passing on of the sins of the people; the goat will now bear the sins of all Israel. This scapegoat will be led out into the wilderness, carrying all the sins of the people with it, where it will most likely be killed by hungry wild animals. Aaron washes himself with water, takes off his sacred garments, and clothes himself in his ordinary vestments prior to appearing before the people, for it is necessary that the one who leads the goat into the wilderness must also cleanse himself. The ashes of the bull and goat are removed in the usual manner, and the one who removes them must wash himself in water.

This atonement must be made once a year by the priests who come after Aaron. The people are to treat the day as they would the Sabbath, making it a day of rest. This atonement is to take place every year on the tenth day of the seventh month.

Review Questions

1. Why are the Israelites willing to offer animals for sacrifice?
2. How is Aaron like Christ in atoning for the sins of his household?
3. What is Yom Kippur?
4. Why does Aaron play such a major role in the Book of Leviticus?
5. How can we apply the idea of the scapegoat to Christ?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 18)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 11)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 11 for further instruction.)

The Day of Atonement (16:1–19)

After Jesus' resurrection, Peter and his companions are fishing when they recognize Jesus on the shore. Peter becomes so excited that he leaps into the water and swims to meet Jesus, who has prepared a meal for them. After they finish eating, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, and Peter responds each time that he indeed loves Jesus. The third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, Peter, in exasperation, protests that Jesus, who knows everything, knows that he loves him. Peter denied Jesus three times during Jesus' passion, and Jesus gives Peter an opportunity to repent by allowing him to protest three times that he does love Jesus. Jesus then warns Peter that his love will be tested when he is led to suffer for Jesus. Peter is ready. (See John 21:15–19.)

Since we are all sinners, we all have need of atonement, just as the Israelites of old. Atonement for Christians does not come in the form of sacrificing animals but in the sacrament of reconciliation. Catholics confess their sins with the hope of not committing the sin again. The Israelites celebrate Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, each year—a sign that despite the desire to avoid sin, many fail to overcome temptation. The desire is sincere, but the temptation to sin often overcomes the desire of living close to God. The same happens with those who celebrate reconciliation. The desire to overcome the sin is there, but the temptation to sin again seems to have so much power. Catholics make use of the sacrament of

reconciliation many times in their life in an effort to reach the stage where they are willing, like Peter, to walk each day with Christ.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

The Scapegoat (16:20–34)

The scapegoat receives the sins of the community and is sent out into the desert to die. When someone receives the blame for the faults of a group, we may refer to that person as a scapegoat. All the wrongs of the group fall on that one person. In the gospels, Jesus takes upon himself the role of a scapegoat by sacrificing himself for all of us. In Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist is preaching to sinners about the need for his baptism as a sign of repentance. Suddenly, Jesus steps down into the water to receive a baptism of commitment from John. Jesus, who is totally sinless, has taken upon himself the sins of humanity, and in our name, he receives John's baptism. We read about Jesus in 1 Peter, where he writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross" (2:24). Jesus, our scapegoat, brings us atonement for our sins.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (LEVITICUS 17—27)

(Read “Note About Genealogies” in “Introduction: Pentateuch II,” page 21. You may skip or scan the biblical text in this section.)

Blood Rituals and Sexual Conduct (17—18)

In chapters 17 and 18, the Lord gives laws concerning blood rituals and sexual conduct. No one, whether an Israelite or an alien, shall take an animal offered for sacrifice and slaughter it outside the meeting tent as was done in the past. They shall not offer their sacrifices to demons. Those who do this shall be condemned as shedding blood and shall be cut off from the community. The same punishment shall be inflicted upon those who eat the blood of an animal. The reason given is that the blood of any animal is its life. Those who eat of an animal that has died or been killed by a beast shall be considered unclean until he or she washes his or her garments, bathes in water, and becomes clean in the evening.

A person shall not have intercourse with a close relative, including one's father, mother, a father's wife, one's sister, the daughter of a father or mother, the daughter of one's son or a daughter's daughter, and others in such a close relationship. They shall not have intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period, with the wife of one's neighbor, with a male as with a woman, or with an animal. Those who perform any of these deeds will be cut off from the community.

Day 1: The Holiness Code (19:1–18)

In this passage, we read about one's relationship with others. Many of the precepts given resemble those found in the Ten Commandments. The call to love father and mother and to keep holy the Sabbath is repeated, and the reason given is that the Law comes from the God of the Israelites. Concern for the poor is so important that some gleanings in the field and some grapes on the vine are to remain after the harvest for the poor to gather. The author adds many sins contrary to the Law of a holy and loving God. The list includes stealing, deception, swearing falsely in the name of God, robbery, insulting those who are deaf, tripping those who are blind, acting dishonestly, balancing partiality by not being too partial to the weak and showing high regard for the rich, slandering, hating one's kindred, revenge, and bearing grudges. Jesus will quote from this passage in the Holiness Code when he tells the people to love their neighbor as themselves.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The list for holiness given in Leviticus is long. In Jesus' era, many scholars of the Law attempted to shorten the list so people could grasp it more easily. This became a major debate. In the Gospel of Matthew, we read that a Pharisee comes to Jesus to test him by asking which commandment is the greatest. Jesus astounds the Pharisee by taking a quotation from the Book of Deuteronomy (6:5) that speaks about the love of God with one's whole being and another from the Book of Leviticus (19:18) that speaks of love of neighbor as oneself and placing them together. Jesus is saying we cannot obey one without obeying the other. The Holiness Code for Christians is the code of love given by Jesus. To love God and neighbor as oneself would lead a person to follow the long list of precepts given in Leviticus.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

(Read “Note About Genealogies” in “Introduction: Pentateuch II,” page 21. You may skip or scan the biblical text in this section.)

Various Rules of Conduct (19:19—24:23)

In these chapters, the Book of Leviticus speaks of statutes concerning the treatment of possessions, ritual cleanliness and dietary laws, penalties for disobeying the Lord's commands, the holiness of the priesthood, Israelite festivals, care for the sanctuary lamp, and the eating of food offered to the Lord.

In 19:19, the author speaks against breeding animals with others of a different species, mixing two different kinds of seeds, or putting on a garment woven with two different kinds of threads. Commentators believe this rule concerns the preservation of creation as God gave it.

The laws given by the Lord continue with the intent of helping the people live in peace and harmony within the community by establishing laws and punishments for those who disobey them. The man who has relations with the female slave of another man shall be liable to a reparation offering or death. The people are not to eat anything with blood remaining in it, since blood is the source of life, nor are they to degrade their daughters by making them prostitutes. The people are not to consult spirits, are to respect the aged and strangers, and use proper scales for measuring.

In chapter 20, the Book of Leviticus touches upon penalties for various sins, such as worshipping false gods, sins against parents, adultery and other sexual sins considered to be aberrations, and a host of sins mentioned earlier in the text. The punishment for many of these sins is to be stoned to death.

In chapter 21, the author presents rules for the sanctity and cleanliness of the priesthood, as well as the priests' instruction not to touch a dead person. The Lord demands purity of body and spirit from the priests, so gives laws concerning prohibitions

against making the crown of their heads bald, shaving the edges of their beards, and marrying a prostitute or divorced woman. The priest shall only marry a virgin. No priest with a blemish, such as blindness, lameness, deformity, or any type of physical flaw shall present food to the Lord, although he may eat the food offered to God.

Chapter 22 speaks of the purity of priests and those with whom the priests can share the food offered to the Lord. The priests are to be pure, avoiding unclean food and contact with humans or animals considered unclean. Any priest who becomes unclean and profanes the sanctuary by ignoring these rules is to die. The priest may share his food with his slave or his daughter (provided she has not married an unauthorized person). Any offering made to God must be an unblemished offering.

Chapter 23 deals with the holy days of Sabbath, Passover, Pentecost, the first day of the seventh month (New Year's Day), the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths that are central to the holiness of the people. The author speaks of the festivals and the days on which the Israelites are to celebrate, and he explains the sacrifices and rituals to be followed.

Chapter 24 is concerned with the light in the meeting tent. The Lord instructs the Israelites to use oil from crushed olives to keep the light burning regularly in the tent of meeting. They are to make twelve cakes of bread in two piles of six each, which is a type of grain offering. Aaron and his sons are the ones the Lord chooses to eat the bread, since it is sacred to the Lord.

The author introduces a story about an Israelite who blasphemes. The Lord directs Moses to have the blasphemer brought outside the camp, and all who heard him blaspheme are to place their hands on his head. The community is then to stone the person to death.

The death of the blasphemer follows the dictates of equal justice. Blasphemy is a sin that demands the life of a person because

of its abomination against God. Those who kill another human being shall be killed. And those who kill an animal belonging to another are to make restitution. When one injures another, the person shall receive a punishment equal to that inflicted on the other, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Though harsh, this law was meant to be a law of justice, where a person could not inflict harm on another worse than the injury one received.

Day 2: The Sabbatical and Jubilee Years (25:1–55)

In this chapter, the author speaks about the sabbatical year, which is the seventh year. The Lord tells Moses on Sinai that for six years they are to cultivate the land they will enter, but in the seventh year, they must allow the land to have a Sabbath rest. During the sabbatical year, the Lord promises to provide for their needs.

The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee year and a sacred year when liberty is granted to all the people of the land and all property reverts to its original owner. The Book of Leviticus does not teach that people own the land since it was the Lord who brought the people there. God owns the land and the people make use of it. For this reason, the Lord can decide that the land be redistributed during the jubilee year. The jubilee year is also a year of a special visitation by the Lord. It is a time for salvation, liberty for all, and a new beginning.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The Sabbath year and the jubilee year were great challenges to the Israelites, since they made demands that were difficult for many to accept. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus enters a synagogue and reads a passage from Isaiah the prophet who sounded like that of one proclaiming a Jubilee Year spiritually as well as physically. Jesus quotes from a passage in Isaiah and applies it to himself. He reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to being glad

tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19). Through this passage, Jesus is teaching his followers how to live the spirit of the jubilee year every day of their lives.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 3: Rewards and Punishment (26—27)

The Lord God is the God of the Israelites who does not tolerate the worship of idols or carved images. It is still not clear whether the images are meant for some to be images of the God of the Israelites or images of pagan gods whom some of the people learned to worship in Egypt. The Lord promises rain and abundant crops for those who obey him, along with peace in the land, which will include peace from vicious animals and war. Since God will be on their side, a few Israelites will defeat a hundred of the enemy, and a hundred Israelites will defeat a thousand. They will prosper under God’s protection as promised in the covenant God made with the nation. God will be in their midst and will be their God, and they will be God’s people. God is the one who brought them out of Egypt and freed them from slavery, proof to the Israelites that their God is more powerful than all the gods of the Egyptians.

Punishment will come upon those who are disobedient, and the promises of abundance and peace will become just the opposite: no rain, no produce, wild animals unleashed, defeat in wars. But even still, God will not desert them completely. God will recall the covenant made with their ancestors whom God led out of Egypt. With this, the passage concerning the decrees and laws given on Sinai to Moses comes to an end. The book ends with a digression on vows, offerings, and dedications made to the Lord.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The message of the Book of Leviticus concerning the treatment of others is central to all lives. Even today, Christians can look at the Code of Holiness that speaks of treatment of one's neighbor and realize how well it fits with the Christian message given by Jesus. Obedience to God's will leads to a happier life. It does not guarantee that life will be without its struggles and disappointments, but Jesus promised to be with us in joyful and difficult times. Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing" (Luke 12:22-23). At the root of happiness and contentment in life is loving one's neighbor as oneself, and loving and trusting God.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. How does the call to be God's holy people impact the lives of the Israelites?
2. Could a sabbatical year work in our global and local cultures today?
3. Do the laws found in Leviticus concerning idolatry point to a cruel God? Explain.
4. How would a Sabbath rest for the land affect the lives of the people?
5. Do you find it easy to believe that God will provide abundance and peace for communities who are faithful to God? Discuss.