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# Leviticus: The Manual on Holiness

PARTICIPATION GRADE

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# Overview of Leviticus

- **Titles of “Leviticus”**
  - **Hebrew *Vayikrah*** – “And he called” (first word or phrase of the text, as in the rest of the *Torah*)
  - **Greek *Leuitkos*** from the Septuagint
    - Deceptive - this is for priests, an office among the Levites but not including all Levities
    - Instructions for Levites are in Numbers
  - **Rabbinic - *Torat Kohanim* means “Instructions for Priests”**
- Documentary hypothesis
  - **Chs. 1–16 “P” older material originally meant for priests only**
    - Priestly code was likely developed during period of Exile when the priests no longer had the temple to fulfill their duties, so they wrote down what they used to do
  - **Chs. 17–27 “H” likely a later development that takes priestly purity and applies it to all of Israel and promised land**
    - After the exile Ezra taught “the Law” even more than before, applying it more and more to the people
    - This development led to the Pharisees, and especially the Essenes, who lived according to the very strict code of Priests, though they were not
  - **Some “H” passages sprinkled throughout, representing a final H Redactor (editor)**



# Structure of Leviticus

- **The Way to God: Sacrifices and Priests (1:1–10:20)**

- Through the Offerings (1:1–7:38)
- Through the Priests (8:1–10:20)

- **The Walk with God: Sanctification (11:1–27:34)**

- Laws Concerning Purity (11:1–15:33)
- Law of the Day of Atonement (16:1–34)

- **Holiness Code (17:1–27:34)**

- Laws Concerning Sacrificing (17:1–16)
- Laws Concerning Standards for the People (18:1–20:27)
- Laws Concerning Standards for the Priests (21:1–22:16)
- Laws Concerning Offerings (22:17–33)
- Laws Concerning Festivals (23:1–44)
- Laws Concerning the Lamp Oil (24:1–4)

- Laws Concerning Bread for the Tabernacle (24:5–9)
- Laws Concerning Blasphemy (24:10–23)
- Laws Concerning the Sabbatical Year (25:1–7)
- Laws Concerning the Year of Jubilee (25:8–55)
- Laws Concerning Obedience (26:1–46)
- Laws Concerning Vows and Tithes (27:1–34)



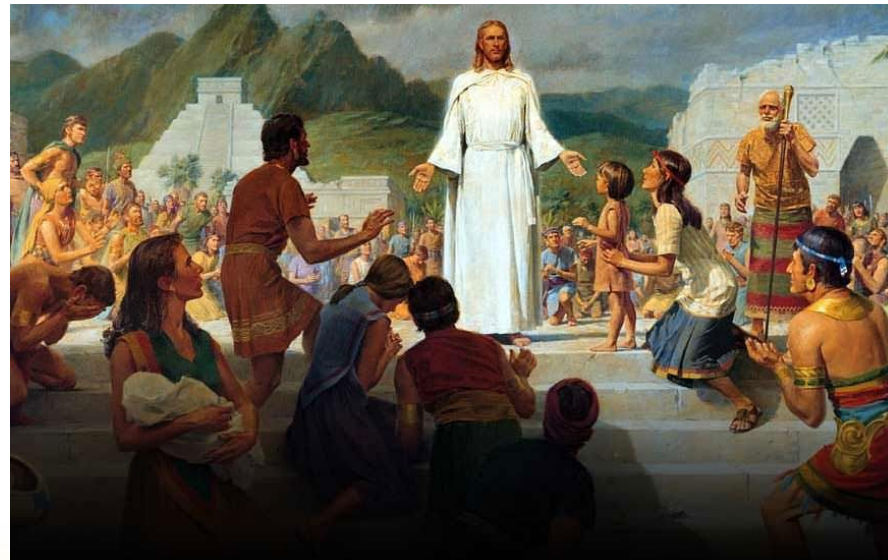
# Themes of the Holiness Manual

The purpose of Leviticus is to provide a manual or handbook on holiness designed to instruct the Hebrew community in holy worship and holy living so that they might imitate God's holiness and enjoy the presence and blessing of God. All of this was done so that God might maintain his dwelling place among the people and walk among them as their God (26.11-12).

“Ye shall be holy; for I am holy” 11:45

\*Holy Space \*Holy Living \*Holy Time

- Holiness of God
- Purity of the covenant community
- Principle of substitution in the sacrificial ritual
- Principle of mediation in the service of the priest
- The redeeming of time by means of the liturgical calendar



**Key ideas:** God desires to dwell with us. No unclean thing may be in the presence of God, so how can God dwell with us?

How do we need to “set ourselves apart” so we can dwell with God?

# “Holiness”

“You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your god am holy” (Lev 19.2) and its many variations (20.7, 8, 26; 21.6, 8, 15, 23; 22.9, 16, 32).

- In the Mosaic system, **holiness was an issue of ritual purity, which reflected a higher, spiritual purity**
  - *Conversely, sin was a sort of ritual contaminant, like tar, that stuck to and defiled—it needed to be washed away or covered up*
- The Tabernacle was a set of concentric zones, each becoming more holy until one came to the symbolic presence of God
  - Unholy (i.e., ritually unclean things and people) needed to be kept out of the holy and most holy areas, and these areas and their contents needed to be periodically purified
  - *Cf. Book of Mormon teachings about “no unclean thing” coming into the presence of God*
- Types of holiness
  - **“Holy” pure items that can be defiled by touching unclean things and people**
  - **“Most holy” items convey holiness**
- **Priestly code extended holiness to sanctuary and priests**
- **Holiness code extends holiness to the promised land and all people**

“The primary meaning of the Hebrew word translated ‘holiness’ (qodesh) is separation. The holy is that which is separate from the profane, the impure, the ordinary. Thus, for example, Israel is holy because it has been separated by Yahweh from other nations. As a consequence to maintain its holiness, Israel must separate itself from the practices of other nations” (154).



# Christian Interpretations of Leviticus

See Jackson, “The Law of Moses and the Atonement of Christ,” *SS*3, 153–172

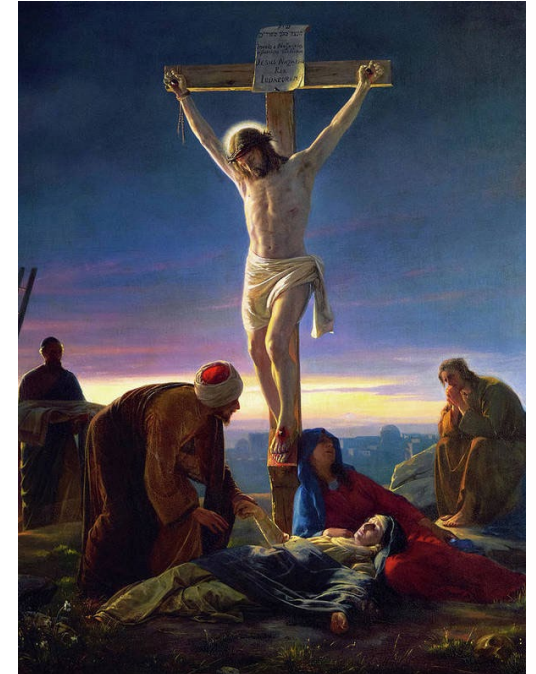
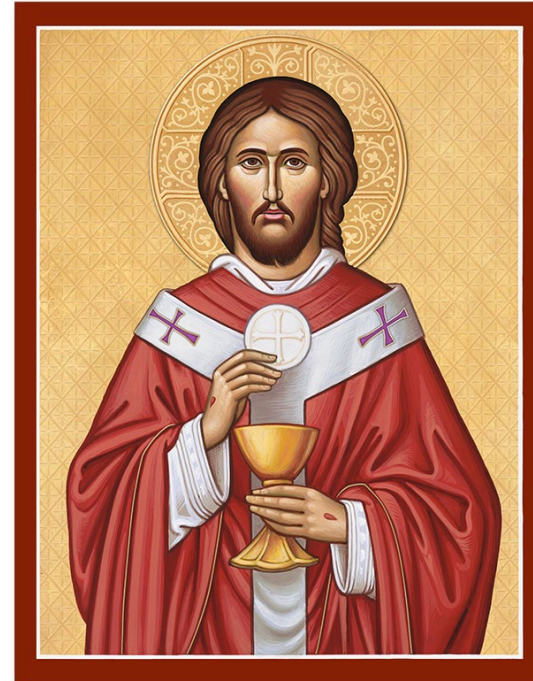
- “Leviticus is the most Christian book in the Old Testament . . .”

- Leviticus teaches:

- the nature and consequences of sin
- Vicarious atonement
- The necessity and “process” of repentance

- Christian symbolism

- Priests = Christ
- Sacrifices = atonement of Christ
- Way to God through a Mediator and ordinances



- Read and consider the following Book of Mormon texts on Law of Moses: 2 Nephi 11:4–6, Jacob 4:4–6, Mosiah 13:27–35, and Helaman 8:13–20

# Sacrifices or Offerings

- **Definitions**

- *Sacrificium*: Latin “to make holy” or “do holy things”
- A gift or offering to God
- Popular: “giving up something good for something better”

- **Procedures**

- Presentation (demonstrates ownership)
- Laying on of hands (transfer of ownership, transfer of guilt)
- Slaughter of animal victims on north side of the altar (transfer complete, victim becomes holy)
- life blood poured out, sprinkled (blood, now holy, covers “sin,” cleanses defilement)
- Burning of all or part (final act of consecration, transference)
- Sacrificial meal (priest and worshipers share in holiness of victim, communion established with deity)

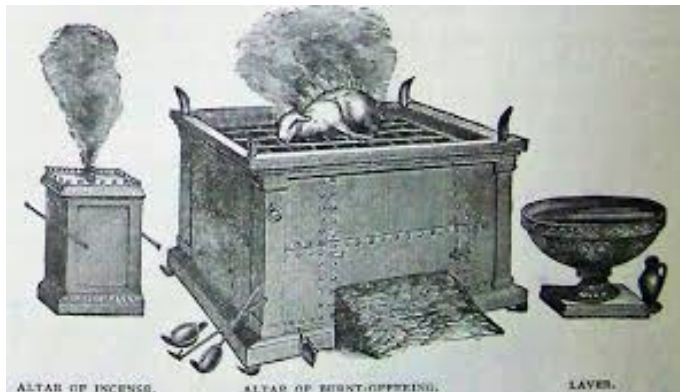
The sacrifices and offerings teach Israel how to be God’s holy people, as do holy places

“The teaching in both the Old Testament and the New Testament clearly indicates that animal sacrifices were not intended to save people from their sins or to get them to heaven. Instead, they preserved the holiness of God’s presence and a healthy relationship between the people and God. The believer under the old covenant was counted as righteous on the basis of faith in Yahweh and faithfulness to the covenant and its stipulations (eg Gen 15:6, Hab 2:4). The external act of ritual sacrifice was symbolic and representative of the internal attitude and disposition of the heart. Psalmist, sage, and prophet reiterated the truth that God does not desire sacrifice, but repentance leading to obedience (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Ps 51:16-17; Prov 21:3; Isa. 1:12-17; Jer. 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8)” (136).

“Ultimately the purpose of Hebrew sacrifice was to worship God and to preserve God’s presence in their midst. The rituals served to instruct the Israelites in the principles of God’s holiness, human sinfulness, substitutionary death as a response to human transgression, and the need for repentance. They provided cleansing and renewed fellowship within the community and with Yahweh.” (Hill & Walton 136)

# Cultural Background of Ritual Purification & Animal Sacrifices

“On one level, sacrifice can be understood as a gift to God. . . . In some types of sacrifice, the roasted meat was shared between deity and worshiper, in effect a kind of ‘communion.’ Some sacrifices can thus be understood as a shared meal, a ritual of uniting. . . . On a second, more functional level, sacrifice can be understood as a collection and distribution system for agricultural products, both animals and crops—in other words, as a form of taxation. It is significant that the three primary pilgrimage festivals are set at the time of the three principal harvest in early spring, early summer, and early fall. At this time the priests would collect a portion of the harvested crops. It would then be stored in temple treasuries, for distribution to the needy in times of famine or before the next harvest had ripened” (Coogan 147-148).



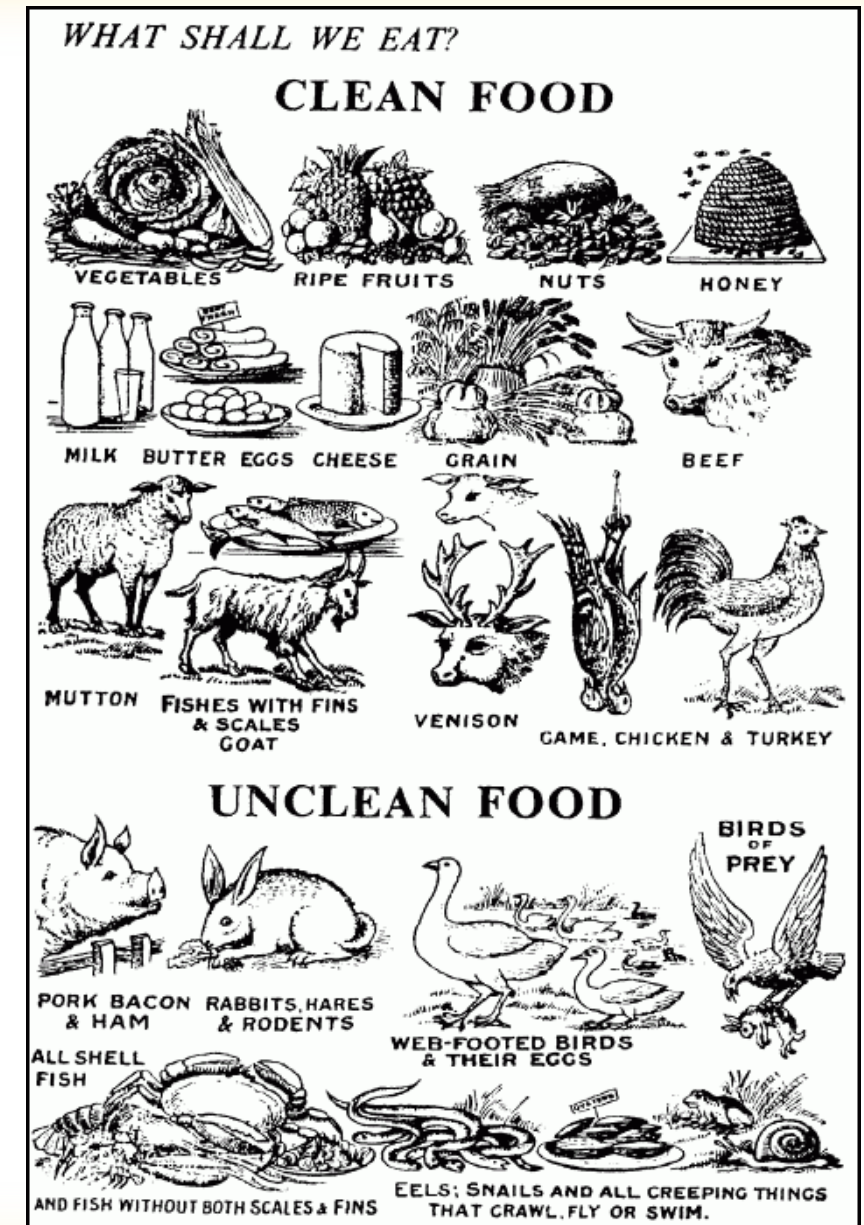
“Ugarit religion, like that of the surrounding civilizations of Babylon, Assyria, and the Hittites, represents a far more complex sacrificial system and cult in general than that found in the pages of the Old Testament. By comparison, Leviticus minimizes the details of sacrificial procedures and especially the many steps involved as well as the groups of animals required to keep the divine world satisfied. This simplification represents the opposite of what has been proposed. Rather than Leviticus providing evidence of the evolution of the sacrificial elements into late and complex descriptions, Ugarit is already complex, and Israel is simple by contrast. Thus the sacrificial system in Israel does not provide evidence of a late and highly developed system. It is almost as though the theology surrounding the Israelite sacrifices sought to maximize the significance of each of them but to minimize the details necessary to perform the rituals” (Hess 93).



# Clean and Unclean Food & Animals

## Laws Concerning Purity (11:1–15:33)

- **Clean and Unclean Foods (11:1–23)**
  - *Even the most basic act of eating required discrimination, thought, and limitation*
  - Rules on foods served as a constant reminder that Israel was different, called to be like God and not the world
- **Unclean Animals (11:24–47)**
  - Unclean animals and carcasses were not only unclean to eat but even to touch
    - Even porous vessels (clay as opposed to stone) could be contaminated
  - a constant reminder of the contaminating power of sinful, unclean, and even just “common things”
- *Simple impurities can be fixed by bathing and washing but pathological impurities need sacrifice*



# Physical Impurities

## Laws Concerning Purity (11:1–15:33)

- **Purification of Women after Childbirth (12:1–8)**
  - Childbirth, although it brought forth life, also spilled blood
- **Leprosy (13:1–14:57)**
  - Leprosy, varieties and Symptoms (13:1–59)
    - Leprosy was not limited to Hansen's Disease; rather included any skin condition
    - Also included *objects*, moldy clothes, homes, etc.
  - Purification of Lepers and Leprous Houses (14:1–57)
    - Complex cleansing rituals emphasize the role of the priests and of sacrifice in overcoming impurities → *point to the healing power of the Savior and the role of ordinances as conduits of grace*
- **Concerning Bodily Discharges (15:1–33)**
  - *Cf. Mark 7:20, "that which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man"*
- **Symbolism?**
  - No unclean things can enter the presence of God: Unclean things cannot even come near tabernacle/temple
  - Reminder to be like the Lord: everyday things can make one unclean and separate one from God
  - *Atonement can overcome all physical and mental deformities*





## Feasts/Festivals

Leviticus 23: each appointed day is a reminder of what God did for Israel

“Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread... And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year.” (Exodus 23:14 - 16)



The point of these feasts/festivals is to create holy time which roots people in God's saving work and renews their trust in and obedience to Him.

*\*Passover*  
*(unleavened bread)*  
*Early Spring*

*\*Pentecost*  
*(firstfruits / weeks)*  
*Late Spring*

*\*Tabernacles*  
*(booths / ingathering)*  
*Autumn*



# Feast of Weeks, Pentecost or First Fruits

Leviticus 23:16-17

*\*50 days (7 weeks) following Passover*

*Late May – June (Passover in March-April)*

*\*Celebrate harvest of crops*

- “Ye shall count [from Passover]...seven Sabbaths... Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord” (Leviticus 23:15–16)
- Traditionally (not scripturally) Pentecost is the day in which the Torah was given.

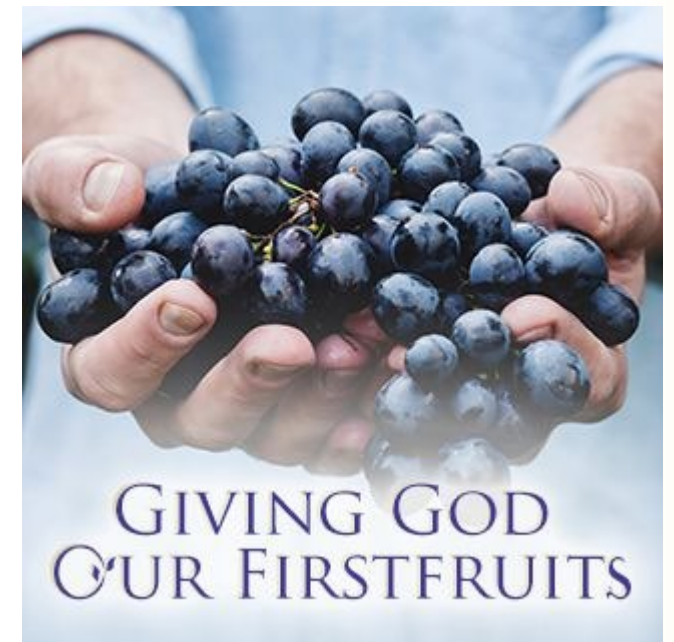


# Feast of Weeks, Pentecost or First Fruits

Leviticus 23:16-17

## *Pentecost is important in Christianity*

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind... And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:1 - 5)





# Rosh Hashanah: Festival of Trumpets

- Typically in September.
- A day of remembrance and goal setting upon which all becomes new.
- Although it's in the 7<sup>th</sup> month it signals the New Year.
- This is part of the High Holy Days and is followed by Day of Atonement 10 days later (23:26-32), with feast of tabernacles 5 days after that.



# Rosh Hashanah: Festival of Trumpets

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts. You shall not work at your occupations” (Leviticus 23:23-25).





# Yom Kippur: Day of Atonement (16:1–34)

- **Topically Leviticus 16 follows chapter 10**
  - The first Day of Atonement was probably an emergency ritual to repair the damage of Nadab and Abihu: Aaron's two sons who spurned the command to wait for holy fire & offered incense with profane fire.
  - Nevertheless, because of the spatial notion of impurity the ritual uncleanness that could not be avoided because of chapters 11–15 demanded that the Tabernacle be regularly cleansed
- **Preparations (16:1–4)**
  - After preparing purification and burnt offerings, **the high priest dressed in white garments** (as an angel or as Christ) rather than in his colorful vestments
- **Offerings (16:5–28)**
  - Offerings are for Aaron, his house, the sanctuary, and the people
  - Addition of **the “scape goat”** who carried the sins of the people into the wilderness.

\*Day of Atonement = “Yom Kippur”  
(Hebrew)

\*Ten days after Rosh Hashanah

\*Special “sin offering” annually for all Israel

\*Sins of Israel transferred to the “scapegoat”

\*High priest sprinkle blood in the holy of holies.

\*The ritual serves to purify the priest, the sanctuary, and the people.

\*It is called a ‘sabbath of sabbaths’ (16.31).

# Entering the Holy of Holies



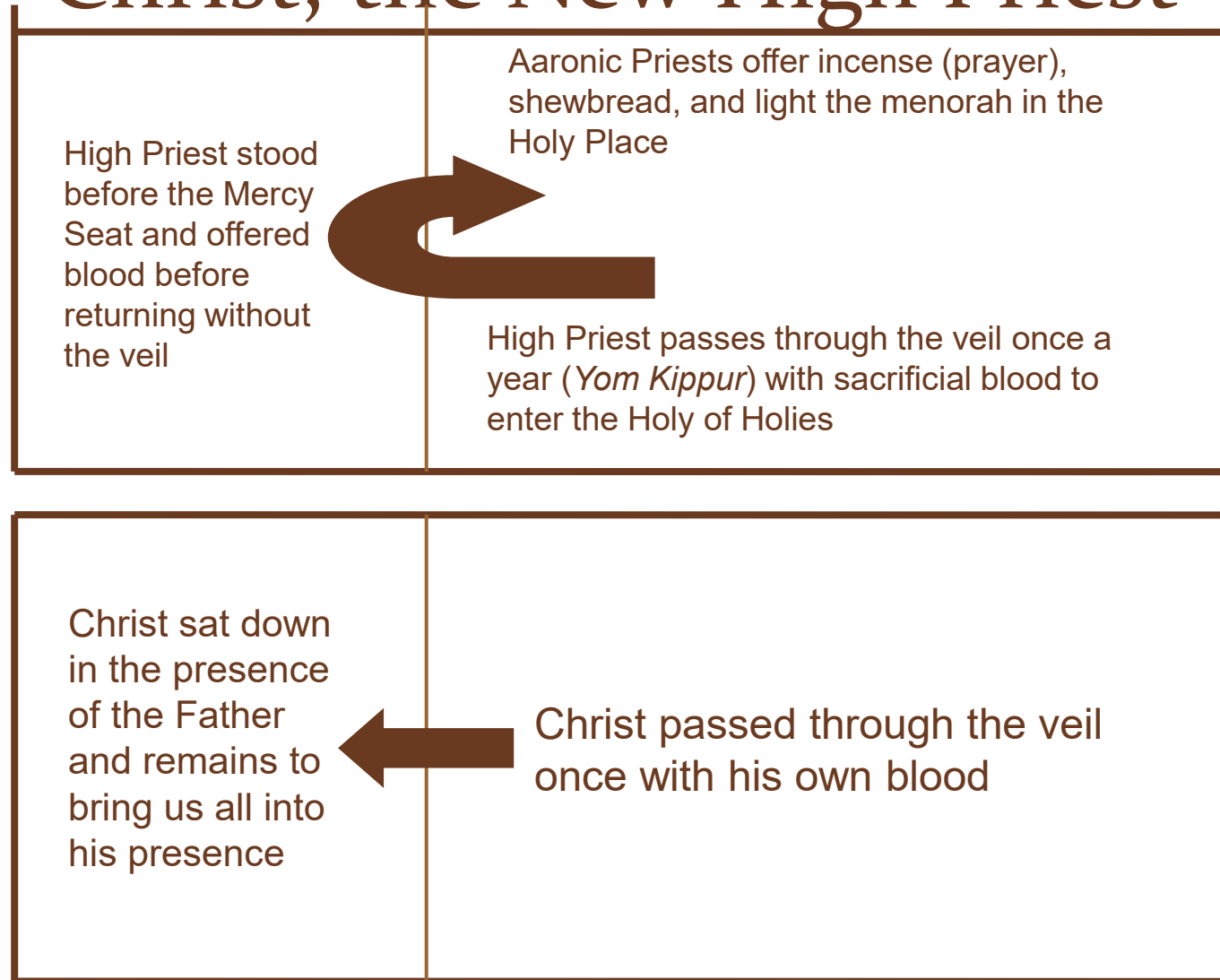
**Key ideas: God desires to dwell with us. No unclean thing may be in the presence of God, so how can God dwell with us?**

**Day of Atonement Then: Christ Now**

- Only on this day did the high priest enter the holy of holies
  - Passes the veil after offering incense (prayer) and not without blood, which is sprinkled on the “place of atonement” (KJV “mercy seat” from German *Gnadestuhle*)
- Summary (16:29–34)

“God’s justice provides a means for dealing with sin and its guilt without denying it or showing favoritism. The divine mercy of God maintains a relationship with his people despite their lapses. This demonstrates God’s holiness, which provides a means by which sinful Israel can enjoy fellowship with a holy God through the forgiveness of their sins.” (Hess 97)

# Christ, the New High Priest



When Christ died on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent (Matt 27:51), symbolizing that all (not just the high priest) now had access to the presence of God through Christ



# Purpose(s) of the Tabernacle/Temple

And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them (Exodus 25:8)

What was the object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world? ... The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 307-308.

“Inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; “Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God. “But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples.” (D&C 97:15-17).

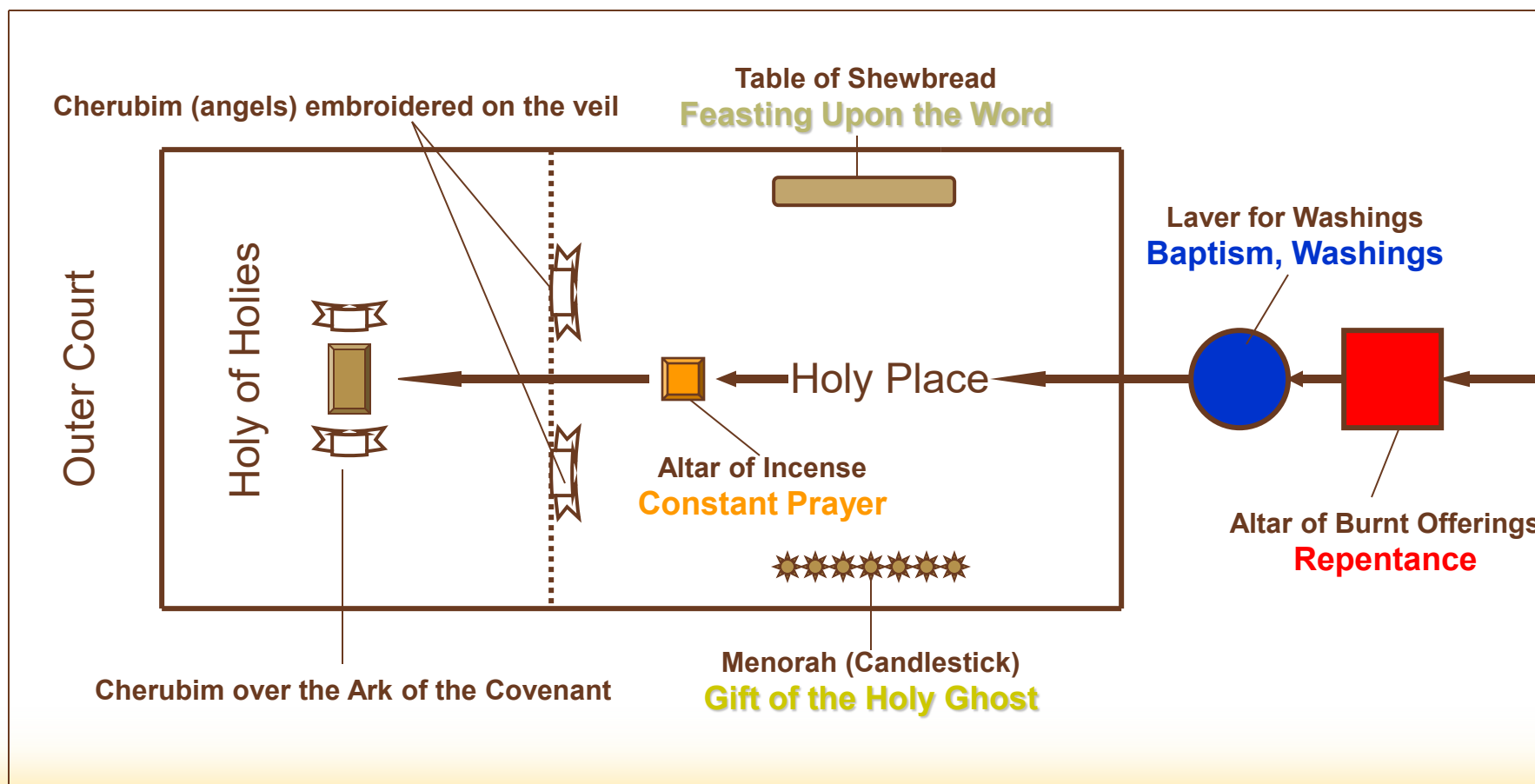
**President Russell M. Nelson made clear for us that we can “see” the Savior in the temple in the sense that He becomes no longer unknown to us. President Nelson said this: “We understand Him. We comprehend His work and His glory. And we begin to feel the infinite impact of His matchless life.”** Henry B. Eyring, I Love to See the Temple, April 2021





# Pressing Forward in Christ:

Using Tabernacle/Temple Imagery to Illustrate the Doctrine of Christ  
(vis-à-vis 2 Nephi 31)





# Feast of Tabernacles or Booths

**Lev. 23:34, 39-44**

**Nehemiah 8:13-18**

“In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land...ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook...Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.  
(Leviticus 23:39–43)

- \*Celebrate final harvest of crops
- \*Dwell in booths (tabernacles)
- \*Remember the Lord



# God's concern for the poor & marginalized as shown through His law & early welfare ideas

“The Sabbath and sabbatical-year ordinances were designed to foster social and economic equality and to inculcate important covenant community principles in Hebrew society, including (1) thanksgiving for past provision and faith in God's continued sustenance during the fallow year, (2) forgiveness in the remission of debts, (3) respect of persons created in the image of God in the manumission or release of slaves, and (4) the practice of generosity and the idea of stewardship in the redistribution of the covenant land . . . . **According to the prophet Jeremiah, neglect of the sabbatical laws and the consequent rejection of the covenant instruction inherent in the commands were responsible for the fall of Jerusalem and the Hebrew exile in Babylon** (cf. Jer. 25:8-14; 2 Chron. 36:17-21). Once the sabbatical cycle was interrupted, the community naturally rejected the legal instruction undergirding the Sabbath principles. God had no choice but to exile his people ‘until the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests’ (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Lev. 18:28)” (Hill & Walton 138-139).

**Jubilee Year: an unprecedented act of social justice where once every fifty years God pushes reset & everyone receive back their inheritances.**

**A Reminder of How We are to Treat Everyone:** Lev 19:33-34 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.  
Lev 19:18 thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.