

Leviticus Chapter 24 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is “Group Effort”. This chapter gives lessons for and about followers of God working as a united group. My subtitle is “input and output”. For now, I’m going to leave those two titles alone and come back to them later in the lesson.
2. First, it is important to put Chapter 24 in context of the previous and next chapters.
 - a) The previous chapter, Chapter 23 outlined all of the holidays of the Jewish Nation. My title of that lesson was “Special Days”.
 - b) The next chapter, Chapter 25, starts with a discussion of “special years”.
 - c) One would think Chapter 23 would flow right into Chapter 25. After all, the topic was holidays and special days. Chapter 25 goes right into a discussion of special years.
 - d) Here in Chapter 24 we get an “interruption” from these special events. It is important to understand why Chapter 24 is here, which will lead back to the lesson titles. With that said, let me summarize Chapter 24 in a few sentences and then come back to “context”.
3. Here is a quick summary of Chapter 24:
 - a) God reminds the Israelites to provide the priests lots of olive oil. The sole source of light in God’s tabernacle is a 7-branch oil lamp.
 - b) God then reminds the Israelites to provide 12 loaves of bread for the priests. These loaves of bread were placed on a special table. The bread is to be changed weekly.
 - c) Finally, we have a historical story of some person among the Israelites who is guilty of blaspheming the name of God. They put the guy in some sort of prison until Moses talks to God about punishment. God gives the guy a death sentence and he is stoned to death.
 - d) OK any questions? ☺ Obviously, we need to understand the significance of these events both in context of the surrounding text and all of Leviticus.
4. Now that I’ve summarized the chapter, lets get back to putting this chapter in context:
 - a) Again, the chapter prior to this one was about special days. The next chapter deals with other special occasions. Why is there this short-chapter on these three items in between?
 - b) As to the bread and oil, the idea is this is part of the “regular” service of all the Israelites to support the priests. The idea, in context of all the holidays is “Don’t forget the every day requirements just because it is some special holiday.” The last chapter dealt with all sorts of special events to happen yearly as well as a mention of the weekly Sabbath. A purpose of the bread and oil instructions here is to remind the people of their daily responsibilities over and above the responsibilities that happen on special days.
5. In a moment, I’ll bring up why these two items (bread and oil delivery) are singled out. First, let’s discuss the third part of the chapter: The condemned guy who is stoned to death.
 - a) Leviticus, for the most part is a set of do’s and don’ts. Actual narrative breaks in the text are pretty rare. The only narrative text in the last few chapters is an occasional one-line reference here and there to the fact Moses did as he was instructed.
 - b) The only more-than-one-line narrative was back in Chapter 10 when two of the High Priest’s sons were killed on the spot for not correctly doing their duties. That is a clue to explaining why this text is here. The first nine chapters were specific instructions to the High Priest. Just to show God was “serious” about His commands, two of the four sons of Aaron-the-High-Priest were killed for disobedience.
 - c) Most of the text since that chapter is about “everyday” behavior for all the Israelites. Now, we have wrapped up “daily living”. It ends with another example of someone being killed for (here’s the key) violating one of those “everyday” laws.
 - d) A big pattern of Leviticus is “God gives a bunch of laws, and then gives an example of disobedience”. It is God’s way of showing how serious He is about disobedience.
 - e) Obviously not everyone dies today who breaks a command. If that were true, the world would be unpopulated. ☺ God gives these specific examples for our learning.

6. Now back to my title: Group Effort. What all three stories have in common is all of Israel is required to bring the bread and oil and all of Israel is responsible to put this guy to death. Obviously not every single person has to say, bake bread or throw stones at the guy. The point is the entire nation is held responsible as a group. We call this “corporate responsibility”. I’ll expand on this with different examples as we go through the lesson.
7. Just so you know, this lesson is going to be a little shorter than other lessons.
 - a) All that happens in this 23-verse lesson is bring some oil and bread, go stone someone and then God gives some commentary on punishment. It’s a pretty light lesson. ☺ I was tempted to combine this lesson with Chapter 25, but that chapter is 55 verses and a different topic. Some offerings and a stoning is enough for one lesson. ☺
8. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. ³ Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. ⁴ The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD must be tended continually.
 - a) Let’s start with the “who” question. Notice in Verse 2 who this section is written to:
 - i) It says, “Command the Israelites”. That means all of Israel is responsible.
 - ii) Notice the word command. This is not a suggestion by God. ☺
 - iii) Obviously, millions of Israelites cannot crowd the tabernacle with jars of oil. I’m sure representatives were picked for this task. The point is all were responsible.
 - b) It’s a time for a quick review on the tabernacle. It is important background to this lesson.
 - i) When the Israelites first came out of Egypt, one of the first orders of business is God called Moses up to Mount Sinai. Besides the 10 Commandments and other rules were instructions on how to build a tabernacle. There is an old joke that is when Charlton Heston came down the mountain carrying The 10 Commandments (in that movie of the same title), he should have had a set of blueprints under his arm as well. ☺ Most of God’s other commandments were construction notes.
 - ii) The Book of Exodus has far more verses dedicated to how to build the tabernacle than say the plagues on Egypt or the crossing of the Red Sea or even the other commandments. The point is “bulk” of Exodus is on tabernacle construction.
 - iii) The tabernacle had an indoor structure surrounded by an outdoor fenced area. The indoor structure was divided into two rooms. One of those rooms was the most sacred, and is entered once per year by the high priest. The other room the priest could enter daily. This is the location-focus of this section of Leviticus. The name of this “everyday” room is called the “Tent of Meeting” in Verse 3.
 - iv) In this section of the tabernacle were three pieces of furniture: An altar for incense, a table that bread was placed upon, and an oil-based lampstand that lighted up this room. All three of those items are in focus in this lesson.
 - v) By the last chapter of Exodus, this structure is completed. Leviticus is the next book of the bible. Much of Leviticus is instructions given to the priests on how to work within this tabernacle structure.
 - c) With all of that background completed, we can now focus on the topic of these four verses here in Leviticus Chapter 24: the lampstand itself.
 - i) For those who have never seen a picture of this Jewish lampstand, it has a single base, and seven oil lamps. It is relatively two-dimensional. Three branches are on the left side and three are on the right side. The number seven is associated with “perfection” as God rested on Day 7 from His “perfect” creation.
 - ii) It is equally important to understand this is an oil-based lampstand. The lamp was to be filled with pure olive oil, which is the source of the light.

- iii) One of the jobs of the High Priest was to make sure the lamp was active from dusk to dawn. While it is the job of the priest to make sure there was plenty of oil, it was the responsibility of all the Israelites to actually supply the oil for this lamp.
- d) OK, enough of the background stuff. Why is this important and why should I care? ☺
 - i) The key is to think about a lampstand. What is its basic function? To light up a room. A lampstand is to provide light. A seven-branch lamp is a model of God's "perfect" light and it is to be "perfectly illuminating"!
 - ii) Now think about the priests' main job: They are to be intercessors between man and God. They are to bring prayers of the people to God. They are to assist in the sacrifices of people. They are on full time duty to minister to the needs of the people. This is a round the clock operation. A priest is "always" a priest just as a doctor is always a doctor whether or not that doctor is on duty.
 - iii) A point of these verses is that the priests were not supposed to go out, pluck olives, and make their own oil. It was the responsibility of the Israelites to actually supply "pure" olive oil. That means the olives were crushed and everything but the oil had to be separated.
 - iv) Throughout the bible "oil" is symbolic of the spirit of God. (E.g., See 1st Samuel 16:13 and Zechariah 4:2-6). Oil is a lubricating function. It helps our "engines run smoothly". For example, in prayer, the Holy Spirit helps us in our times of prayer:
 - a) "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God...In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." (1 Cor. 2:10b-12, NIV).
 - b) My point of this quote by Paul in 1st Corinthians is that a purpose of the Holy Spirit helps us understand God's will for our life. The Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer life, and in our bible reading. To use a word-picture, the Holy Spirit "lights up" God's intention for our lives just as this seven-branch candlestick lights up God' tabernacle.
- e) Here comes the important part. Time to pay attention! ☺
 - i) The emphasis of these four verses is the command of the "people" to bring the olive oil. This is to be a group effort, which is the title of the lesson. It is the responsibility of all the Israelites to bring the oil. Even though a handful of people probably did all the work, all were held accountable for this action.
 - ii) What does this mean for you and me? This is about "supporting" those in the full time ministry. A good example is praying for the leaders of our church.
 - iii) A classic illustration fits here: One of the most famous pastors of the 19th Century was Charles Spurgeon. He was the pastor of a 5,000-seat church in a time era before electricity. One day, some visitors wanted to see the church. They ran into Spurgeon on a Sunday afternoon. Spurgeon was dressed in overalls and the visitors thought he was the janitor. The visitors wondered how this big hall was heated and asked the "janitor" to show the visitors the boiler room.
 - a) Spurgeon then lead the visitors down to the basement. In this basement, on Sunday afternoon, was a special room. He opened the door, and there was a group of people praying. Spurgeon then said, "This is the boiler room that "heats up" this great church!"
 - b) Spurgeon's point was that it is prayer that makes a great leader. The secret to any great ministry is a great and consistent prayer support team.
 - iv) This does lead back to the "oil" command: Just as the Israelites were asked to bring the oil to the priests, so does God ask all of us to bring the "oil" to our own place of worship. It is our job to pray for our local ministries. We are to do so often and regularly.

- a) Examples include praying for your church leaders by name. Pray that God protects them and use them effectively. If there is a radio preacher that blesses your life, pray for that person and their ministry team. If there is a written bible study that benefits you, pray for the person writing it. ☺ These are examples of “supplying the oil”.
 - v) The reverse-side of this word-picture is that “without the oil, the priests can’t do their job”. They would be like stumbling around in the dark without a lighted lamp. Show me a church that is ineffective for God and I’ll show you a church with a lack of prayer for the leaders of that church.
 - f) Now let’s get back to this text in context of the surrounding chapters.
 - i) The last chapter is about “special days”. It is about all of the special days of the year in which all of the Israelites are to focus on God. The priests are to lead all of the various processions including the weekly Sabbath. It would be “logical” for God to then command all of Israel to prayerfully support their leaders.
 - g) OK, so why doesn’t the bible just say, “Pray for the rabbi’s?” ☺ Why give this ordinance about providing oil for the tabernacle, if that is what it means?
 - i) For starters, we as people tend to remember word-pictures better than we do facts and figures. If God just said, “pray for your leaders”, we would tend to get lazy and forget. If there is a physical effort involved, such as crushing olives and bringing that to the priests, it would keep our focus on the jobs at hand.
 - ii) Next, the idea is more than just prayer. It is about support through service. People had to go physically crush the olives and bring them to the priests.
 - iii) Churches are full of volunteers giving of their time so the service can run smoother, like a well-lubricated, (i.e., Spirit filled!) well-oiled machine.
 - iv) When we volunteer to help in church, we are “providing that olive oil”. That would include any sort of service that is part of worship. Helping to set up service or clean up would count. So would be involved in helping out with children’s education during service time.
 - h) Therefore, the guilt-ridden question to ask ourselves is, “Have we given our contribution of oil to the church lately? In order to make the ministry for God more effective, are we doing our part by supplying the oil? Give that some prayerful thought today.
 - i) One last thing: Verse 3 specifies the priests were responsible for keeping the 7-stick lamp going from dusk to dawn. This is an indoor structure. How does one see inside there in the daytime, other than keeping the front door open? ☺
 - i) The point I’m trying to make here is that there is a word-picture in that fact it is a “dusk to dawn” operation. The idea is “the light is illuminating the darkness”.
 - ii) This ties to Jesus statement of “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, 9:5). Further, Jesus calls believers the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). The difference is Jesus is like “sunlight” as a source of light. We as Christian “priests” are like moonlight in that we are reflectors of that light source. It is the job of priests to keep light illuminated over darkness.
9. Verse 5: "Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. ⁶ Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. ⁷ Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. ⁸ This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. ⁹ It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire."
- a) Verses 1-4 focus on the first command of all the Israelites: Provide oil for the priests.
 - b) Verses 5-9 focus on the second command of all the Israelites: Provide bread for the priests.

- c) Specifically, 12 loaves of bread are to be made each week as stated in Verse 5. The logical assumption is that the 12 loaves represent the 12 tribes of Israel.
- d) To explain this, we have to go back to the tabernacle construction in Exodus:
- i) As I stated earlier, there are three pieces of furniture in this room of the indoor structure of the tabernacle: The 7-branch candlestick, an altar for incense and a table for bread. The focus of these verses is on the bread-table.
 - ii) The idea of these verses is that the 12 loaves of bread were laid out in two rows of six each. (That would fit the shape of the table.) Each week all of Israel was to provide these 12 loaves and the job of the priests would be to eat them.
 - iii) It is not stated in this text, but the bread was probably unleavened bread. Each loaf would be flat and round as there is no yeast in that bread.
 - iv) Verse 9 states that the bread belongs to Aaron and His sons. They are to eat it just as they are to eat the other “holy” offerings. The idea of a holy offering is that the offering is fully dedicated to God. Since the priests and His sons (next in line to be the priests) were also “holy” as they were fully dedicated to God, they were allowed to eat what was “holy” as specified throughout Leviticus.
- e) OK, on to the meaning of the text. Why is this here and why is it important?
- i) Part of the Lord’s Prayer taught by Jesus is “Give us this day our daily bread”. (Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3). Was Jesus just talking about physical bread or does that include all of our physical needs? The answer is the latter. That line of the prayer is about God providing for our physical needs.
 - ii) A common slang term for “bread” is to associate it with money. Again, the idea of bread is association with provision.
 - iii) This leads us back to the table in the tabernacle. The King James Bible calls this the “Showbread” (Exodus 25:30, 35:13, and 39:36). The bread is also called the “face bread” as the literal translation is that the bread is before the face of God.
 - a) The idea of the bread is before God. It represents the fact that God provides for our daily needs.
 - b) There is a mistaken idea that God is only interested in our salvation. The idea of this bread is that God also cares about our life “here and now” and provides for our daily substance.
- f) Now the even more important stuff: How does this apply to our lives today?
- i) As I alluded to earlier, the term “bread” is associated with money. In a broader context, it is associated with money.
 - ii) Do our pastors need prayer support of course? Can prayer buy groceries? No. ☺ The point is our local church requires our financial support as well as prayer support. Those who work in the “professional” ministry require the financial support of its congregation.
 - iii) I can guarantee you almost all pastors hate asking for money. If people simply provided enough “bread”, it wouldn’t be necessary.
 - iv) The main idea is that in order for a ministry to be effective, it requires prayer support and financial support. That is the main idea behind the “bread and oil” being supplied by all of Israel. Again, success requires “group effort”.
 - v) At this point everyone always thinks about “abuse”. There are ministries that take advantage of people’s guilt and good nature. How does one tell the good ones from the bad ones? For starters, try to see what that ministry has accomplished. See if that ministry has an open-book policy. There are a handful of very good independent Christian accountability (accountant) groups that watch over large ministries. Finally, one has to remember that they are accountable to God. I’ve yet to see an abusive ministry last a long time. God won’t tolerate it.

10. I want to touch upon Verse 7 again. Here it is: "Along each row (of bread) put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread."
- a) Let's talk about the "what" of this verse: pure incense. Part of the construction of the tabernacle was that a specific aroma was to be associated with this tabernacle. God gave instructions to Moses to make a specific "perfume". That concoction was not to be used other than for the tabernacle. Again, the idea is that the tabernacle is specifically set apart for God's use, which is what "holy" means. To help people remember the uniqueness of this tabernacle, it is to have its own fragrance. This is all in Exodus Chapter 30.
 - i) That same incense was to be placed with the bread. Most commentators, along with Jewish tradition said that some incense was placed next to each piece of bread as opposed to being poured on the bread.
 - ii) If you recall, I stated there were three pieces of furniture in this room: The candlestick, this table for bread and an altar for incense. Most suspect that after the bread was eaten, the incense was then poured onto this altar.
 - b) Now let's talk about the "why" of this verse: Why is incense to be on this bread table?
 - i) When one lights up incense, there is smoke rising to the sky as well as a sweet smell. It is symbolic of prayer. The smoke is "rising up to heaven". It has a nice smell and that is "pleasing to God".
 - ii) Now let's tie this to the bread. The bread represents God providing our substance for our daily living. Prayer needs to be "intermingled" with the bread. That is why the incense is mixed in with these 12 loaves of bread.
 - c) "OK, I'm still confused. Why doesn't God just say to us to pray for our spiritual leaders and write them a check once a week? ☺ Why go through all of this trouble?
 - i) I'll answer that with a Proverb: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings." (Proverbs 25:2 NIV).
 - a) What does that mean? God lays out the bible in "word-pictures" for us to figure out. If God just gave us direct commands we would be bored quickly. We are the "kings" who get the privilege of figuring out what God has "concealed".
 - ii) One has to remember, this was written at a time where there was no currency. Israel was on their own for the first time in history. There was a literal tabernacle and literal olive oil was needed to light the lamp. The applications today have to do with illumination (via prayer and other things) and support. The main idea, then and now is that "group effort" is needed in order for the worship of God to proper functionally.
 - iii) Can one also apply this on an individual level? Of course. We ask God to provide for our own needs and we should pray for our spiritual well being. One can apply the principals of these verses with a one-on-one relationship with God. I believe the main idea is about "group effort". Christianity was never meant to be a solo effort. God desires interaction between believers. That is a central idea being played out in these verses.
11. Verse 10: Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. ¹¹ The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) ¹² They put him in custody until the will of the LORD should be made clear to them.
- a) From Verse 10 to Verse 23, we deal with the death of this one guy who cursed God. Intermingled with these verses is some additional commentary on punishment for sins.
 - b) The basic story in these three verses is that this man is half Jewish and half Egyptian. He was caught blaspheming God in some fashion. The man was put in custody. Moses then prayed to God for a decision as to what to do about this guy.

- c) One thing that caught my attention is the guilty party is never named. The text goes out of its way to say this guy was half Jewish and half Egyptian. The text even gives his mother's name, his grandmother's name and which tribe (Dan) is his Jewish lineage.
- i) This is because not only is he going to die, but his name is "blotted out" as if to show he is condemned to hell for his actions. I'll talk more about why he is condemned in a moment. First, stop and compare that the two sons of Aaron who messed up as high priests and were killed back in Leviticus Chapter 10: Those two sons of Aaron were named by name (Nadab and Abihu). The two sons of Aaron still believed in God, they just were disobedient to God's commands in their duties. I'll argue those two are saved because they were named by name.
- d) To understand this crime, one has to understand "names" in this culture. A person's name represented one's reputation. It is like when we say, "he or she has a good name". In that cliché, we are not referring to their literal names, as much as their reputation.
- i) I'm pretty positive the crime of this guilty person is far more than just insulting God verbally. It's not like the guy stubbed his toe and yelled out God's name in vain. It is more like this guilty guy didn't believe in God and somehow yelled it out his true belief.
 - ii) The text mentions the fact he blasphemed the name of God after getting into a fight. The text doesn't say why the fight broke out. I suspect the guy didn't like living by all the Israelite rules because he didn't believe in God.
 - iii) In times of anger, people often blurt out what they really think. The same applies to times when a person is drunk." My grandmother, who was Croatian, taught me the expression, "Istina Vina", which means "In wine there is truth". It means when a person is drinking, the truth often comes out what they are thinking.
 - iv) Going back to the text, notice Verse 11 does not refer to God as "God" but as "The Name". God's name and His reputation are to be respected. Because this guy blasphemed (insulted) God's name, the term "The Name" is used instead of "God". To paraphrase the text, "Because this guy insulted God's name, we aren't even going to put God's name in the same sentence out of respect".
- e) Let's talk a little about the fact this guy is a "half-breed".
- i) When the Exodus occurred out of Egypt, a "mixed multitude" also came out with the Jewish population (Ref. Exodus 12:38). During the time of the 10 plagues, of lot of non-Jewish or part-Jewish families were thinking, "You know, maybe this Moses guy is right and Pharaoh should let these people go." ☺
 - ii) The mixed multitude must have been close enough to the Jewish population to think, "Hey, maybe we should put some lamb's blood on our door just in case Moses is right." When you read Exodus Chapter 12 carefully, it never says only the Jewish families will be saved from the death of the firstborn. It says in effect anyone or everyone who performs this ritual will be spared death.
 - iii) Among those who came out of the Exodus were the parents of this condemned man. Notice nowhere in the bible does God condemn those who are half-breeds. Notice nowhere in the bible does God say to Moses, "Separate for me all those who are not 100% Jewish so I can kill them." It was neither a crime nor a sin to be half-Jewish. The crime was the blasphemy. There were restrictions for Jews to marry non-Jews (See Deut. 7:3). That is different from punishing the "offspring".
 - iv) So why does the text go to all the time and trouble of pointing out this guy was half-Jewish and half-Egyptian?
 - a) The bible likes to work in "puns". Not in terms of jokes, but in terms of double-references. The idea is this condemned person had a "mixed background" and he had mixed loyalties. He had to choose between his old Egyptian lifestyle or following the Jewish lifestyle.

- f) Let's get back to the text: The guy was guilty of blaspheming God's name in some way. Again, it was more than just blurting out God's name in anger, it was more like the guy's true belief was to rebel against God's laws. The guy was "locked up" until Moses could seek God about what to do.
- i) Remember the Israelites were wandering in the desert. They didn't have a prison. I suspect the guy was just tied up and put somewhere until a decision was made.
 - ii) Why did Moses seek God's help on this? If you study the law carefully up to this point, the crime for blasphemy is never bluntly stated. God already gave lots of instances of death penalties for sin violations and lighter penalties for other violations. To blaspheme God is a violation of one of the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:7). Since the punishment for violating this crime was not stated, Moses sought God for the answer.
- g) Now let's move on to a New Testament perspective: Jesus said the only unforgivable sin is "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit". (Ref. Matthew 12:31-33, et. al.) Jesus said this right after someone accused Him of using demonic powers to perform his miracles. A purpose of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of their sins and show them that Jesus is Lord and needed for forgiveness.
- i) My view on the sin of "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" is that this is about a lifetime denial of Jesus as Lord. If the only requirement for eternal salvation is to accept Jesus' payment for our sins and believe Jesus is Lord. It would also be logical that the only reason to be denied salvation is to deny Jesus as Lord.
 - ii) With that said, one cannot utter some specific words to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Many adults who become born-again believers have gone through a period of their life where they had their doubts about Jesus or didn't believe He was God. I've met Christians who come from atheist backgrounds. The point of this damning crime is that one has such hatred for Jesus that they have gone beyond a "point of no return" and will never accept the fact of who Jesus is. We as humans never know when one reaches that point. Only God the Father knows that point. We can only judge behavior.
 - iii) Notice Jesus never tells said to His followers "Go stone the Pharisee's to death for their lack of belief in me." Jesus wants us to change people's behavior one heart at a time. Christianity needs to be a free will decision, not forced on people. My point here is God never calls Christians to kill people for a lack of belief.
 - iv) Punishment for sin within the Christian church goes back to the "Matthew 18 model" (Verses 15-17). Jesus said that if a person sins, we are to approach them ourselves with that issue. If they continue to sin, we are to approach them with witnesses. If they continue to sin, we are to kick them out of the church. My point is Jesus stops at that point. Jesus never says to kill someone for a lack of belief. That should be our model for dealing with unbelief.
 - v) So, is that a contradiction? Moses is about to be told to go stone the guy. Why is there one standard in the Old Testament and a lighter standard in the New? The same question can be expanded to ask, "Why aren't Christians required to obey all the Old Testament laws?" The answer is Jesus' fulfilled the requirements of the law for us. The balance is God asks us to live a life of obedience based on gratitude for His payment. Does that mean we stone "Christians" who curse God? No. Again, Matthew Chapter 18 gives us the model for dealing with sin within the church. The top punishment is excommunication. (A separate issue is how society deals with crime. Government is God-ordained and that means government punishes criminals to protect society.)

- vi) The amazing thing isn't that God required killing this guy; the amazing thing is that God decided to spare us! God's requirements don't change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The only difference is God sent His son to be killed on our behalf. The only reason we are not "stoned to death" for our sins is the payment has been made. For that, we need to show gratitude.
 - vii) Meanwhile, let's get back to the scene of the crime. ☺
12. Verse 13: Then the LORD said to Moses: ¹⁴ "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. ¹⁵ Say to the Israelites: `If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; ¹⁶ anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.
- a) Now comes the guilty pronouncement by God.
 - b) The text says those who actually heard the guilty man blaspheme must lay hands on him. The idea is that witnesses are necessary in order to convict the guilty of the crime.
 - c) Next, the text says the entire assembly is to stone him. There are several million Jewish people wandering through the desert. That's a lot of rocks to throw. ☺ I suspect it means either representatives of the whole community do the job, or at least those in the vicinity.
 - d) Now comes the important part. Time to pay attention again. ☺ Let's talk about why this text is here, and how it relates to the bread-and-oil requirements earlier in this chapter.
 - i) In the earlier part of this chapter, the underlying message is, "Without the help of the entire assembly, the tabernacle cannot function properly. Unless the people brought bread and oil to the priests, they cannot intercede for them to God."
 - ii) Here in these verses, we have God's command's "working in the other direction".
 - iii) In these verses, God gives the commands. Unless the general assembly obeys and follows through with the commands, God is wasting His breadth!
 - iv) Think of this whole chapter as the necessity of "input and output". (If you recall, that was my subtitle for this lesson. I knew I'd eventually reference it! ☺)
 - a) In other words, God requires our input and our output in order to function as a believing society. Examples of the "input" are bringing bread and oil to the priest. Modern examples include the necessity of praying for those in the full-time ministry and financially supporting them.
 - b) An example of an Israelite "output" is to actually follow through with God's commands. In this case, it was to stone someone to death.
 - c) A modern example of Christian "output" might be to follow through in any volunteer effort we committed ourselves to in church. Another example is to follow through in our commitment to obedience to God.
 - v) This gets back to one of my favorite cliché's: Without God, we can't, and without us, "God won't". God desires to work through people. If God said we are to execute this person (or whatever command is given) and we don't follow through, then God is wasting His time. There has to be a follow through effort which I call "output" on our part. I'll come back to this concept after some more text.
13. Verse 17: " `If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. ¹⁸ Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution--life for life. ¹⁹ If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: ²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. ²¹ Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death.
- a) We get an "interruption" in the story of this crime and punishment so God can give some additional commentary on punishment. Remember that the second half of this chapter is an actual story (narrative) as opposed to a set of do's and don'ts. From Verses 17-22, we get an interruption in the story for God to interject some more laws.

- b) The reason God gives this additional commentary is people can wonder, “Well, if we have to execute this guy for blaspheming God, where do we draw the line? How bad does a person have to sin or commit some crime before we execute them?” That’s the idea behind these particular verses.
 - c) The basic idea of these verses is that when it comes to crime-punishment, we are to do what is fair. If someone commits murder, then one must do capital punishment. If one hurts someone, then the guilty must be punished in a manner equal to the crime.
 - d) The point of all these verses is to limit the punishment, not minimize it. Since God ordered the execution of this one blasphemer, what God is doing in these verses is saying, “Hey folks, put on the brakes. Just because this one crime is guilty of death does not mean every crime is guilty of death. Do what is fair in each case.”
 - e) Notice in Verse 20 where it says, “fracture for fracture, eye for eye”. Does that mean if someone breaks a bone in assaulting someone, is the guilty person is to have the same bone broken? More likely, it means the punishment should be equitable to the crime. Let’s say the guilty party can’t work for the next six months due to injuries. Maybe the guilty party has to financially support the guilty party for that time frame. That would be a fair punishment. However the innocent is damaged, the guilty should be punished to an equal level, through some sort of compensation or time served in jail.
 - f) Another major point of this paragraph is that God ordains capital punishment. As I’ve mentioned in earlier lessons, capital punishment is the only punishment mentioned in all five books of Moses (i.e., the first five books of the bible). God is putting His stamp of approval on public executions in cases where a person is found guilty of a crime.
14. Verse 22: You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.' "
- a) Verse 22 wraps up this paragraph and says the “same law” is to be for the alien as well as the native-born.
 - b) Let’s get back to the “half-breed” who was to be executed. Assumedly, one of the reasons Moses prayed to God about this issue of whether or not this guy should be killed is because he was not “100% one of the chosen people”. God answers that question by saying in effect, “If anyone decides to live by God’s terms (laws) then they have to be punished by God’s terms. It doesn’t matter if they are a “Son of Abraham” or not.
 - c) In a sense, this is a positive statement. Verse 22 is implying that a non-Jewish person can be accepted as part of the Hebrew nation, i.e., convert. The bad news is they have to accept all the laws and the punishment that goes with the laws.
 - d) It is also important to state that these laws only apply to those who choose to be part of the Jewish Nation. If you read Verse 22 out of context, one could think it means it is ok to say, punish nonbelievers in God if they blaspheme His name. The context of these verses is for those who choose to follow God.
 - e) The other aspect of this verse is that the Israelites are not to have a double standard. They can’t let someone off the hook because they are either 100% Jewish or only part Jewish. The same standards apply to everyone who chooses to follow God.
15. Verse 23: Then Moses spoke to the Israelites, and they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him. The Israelites did as the LORD commanded Moses.
- a) We’re back to the narrative itself. The final verse is the actual execution.
 - b) Notice only one verse is given to the actual deed. The emphasis of the text is that Israel does follow through with what God commanded. Verse 23 takes the time and trouble to point out they actually did follow through.

16. In my introduction, I promised to shorten this lesson a little and I'm following through. ☺ If one forgets the chapter details, remember the concept of "input and out" and "group effort".
- a) The basic idea is that God wants all believers to work as a group. Further, we are responsible for "input" to help those in the full time ministry and "output" to follow through with their commands.
 - b) Remember God's "organizational chart" for the Israelites. The top is God. He then appoints a high priest to be the intercessor between God and man. God also appoints assistants to help the high priest. The lower rung is all the people who believe in God.
 - c) The "input from bottom to the top" requires bringing bread and oil. Oil represents the power of God to be effective. We pray for our leaders to do God's will and be effective leaders over us. The bread represents financial support and with volunteer support.
 - d) The "output from top to bottom" is to obey the commands from God, "via the high priest" and down to the everyday believers. It is a group effort as well as we as a group-of-believers are held accountable for our actions.
 - i) By the way, this does not mean we blindly accept everything our church leaders say. God's word is our standard for our behavior. We pray for our church leaders as they minister to us just as we minister to them.
 - e) Now let's go back to the concept of Jesus as our High Priest. The reason we pray, "In Jesus' name" is that we understand Jesus is our High Priest making intercession for us to God our father. We are providing the "bread and oil" as requests to God to make intercession in our lives. The "output" for us is our obedience to God.
 - f) Let me end this with something Jesus said. People always wonder what does one have to do once they believe in Jesus. What "efforts" does one have to make? Well, someone once asked Jesus that very question:
 - i) "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29 NIV).
 - ii) The short answer to that statement by Jesus is to believe He fulfilled the requirements of the law for us. Our salvation depends upon our belief in Him.
 - iii) The "long answer" is to think, "If I am believing in Jesus, what am I doing about it? Do I trust Him in all aspects of my life? Do I trust Him in whatever problem I am dealing with right now or am I trying to fix it without Him?"
 - g) I believe God holds us (collectively as believers) accountable for "input and output". Again, it is a group effort. It starts with praying and supporting those ministries that we are involved with and benefit our lives. It starts with being supportive of those around us. We "input and output" both individually and as a group.
 - h) This gets back to our basic function as Christians: To help each other believe in Jesus. It is to be a group effort. Praying and supporting our leaders is just one example. Following through with what is commanded of us is just another example. Helping and supporting those around us is another example.
 - i) OK, off the soapbox. Let's go pray and input to God. ☺
17. Let's pray: Father, We thank You for not only sparing our lives, but calling us into a life of salvation. We too, deserve that stoning for not being in full obedience to You. It is only by Your grace that we have been spared the same punishment. Out of gratitude, we desire to worship You and help support other believers around us. We pray especially for our church leaders and those helping us draw closer to You. Continue to protect them and bless their work. Help us to follow through with what You ask us to do. Give us the strength, the desire and the boldness to follow through with what You ask of us, and the discernment to make the right decisions. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.