

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION IV
A MESSAGE SETTLING QUESTIONS OF LAW RELATED TO A SPECIFIC OFFENSE
Leviticus 24:10-23

This section of Leviticus returns to discussing aspects of Israel's civil law. It does so because an incident occurred that raised issues that had not been covered in the MESSAGES Jehovah had given up to this point. So, this MESSAGE intrudes into the otherwise orderly plan of the MESSAGES of the book. In response to the incident that occurred, it deals with matters related to the legal system of Israel in the midst of a section that deals with the religious system of Israel and another that deals with the economic system of Israel. Therefore, this one MESSAGE forms one complete section of this book.

The incident that raised the issues that are dealt with in this MESSAGE was that a man of mixed Israelite and Egyptian blood had cursed Jehovah and blasphemed Jehovah's name. Everyone knew that what the man had done was a serious offense, because it was equal to rejecting Jehovah as his God. However, no one was sure what the penalty should be for such a crime. At least, they could not agree on the penalty; and even Moses could not give a definitive answer. Only Jehovah could satisfactorily settle the issue. Therefore, the man was placed in confinement until Jehovah could give them directions. At the end of the MESSAGE about the oil and bread for The Holy Place (MESSAGE 35, Lev. 24:1-9), Moses presented the issue to God and received highly informative answers concerning all questions it raised.

The answers Jehovah gave formed a basis for handling many legal cases that Israel's judges had to face in later times. Those answers even played a crucial role in Jesus' execution, because the crime for which Jesus was crucified was blasphemy against Jehovah God (Matt. 26:65-68; Mark 14:63-64; Luke 22:67-71). Even though Jesus claimed to be the promised divine Messiah when He was questioned by the Sanhedrin, He did not blaspheme because He truly was the Messiah. Because the majority of the Sanhedrin earnestly wanted to get rid of Him and because they refused to accept Him as Messiah, they found Him guilty of blasphemy. On the basis of the law revealed in this MESSAGE, they declared Him worthy of death; and then they pressured Pilate until he allowed them to crucify Jesus. Because the laws revealed in this MESSAGE were severely abused in finding Jesus guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death, Christians need to be studied with great care. Only by understanding them correctly can we be certain that we will not make the same mistake the Sanhedrin made. Christians today do not have to face the responsibility of executing a blasphemer, because no other nation has or ever has had the same relationship to God that Israel does. We believe that a person should be free to choose his own beliefs about God without interference from the government, but that freedom does not prevent us from having to face the issue of blasphemy. Much in this MESSAGE throws light on what blasphemy is and how Christians should deal with it today. So we need to study it carefully.

This MESSAGE does not tell how long the offending man was kept in confinement before his case was presented to Jehovah. Likely he had been confined for only a matter of hours. The question was a pressing one, and the Israelites would not have waited long for an answer. Since Jehovah was speaking to Moses every day, no need existed to wait for another day to present the question to Him. Therefore, it is highly likely that the issue was presented to God the very day the man committed the offense. The incident may explain why the information about the holy assemblies had been broken into five MESSAGES (MESSAGES 30-34). All those MESSAGES concerned one subject. They were short, and they were dependant on each other. These comments have suggested that all five of those MESSAGES were given to Moses on the same day and that some interruption may have called Moses away and caused God to wait for him to return between parts of the MESSAGE (see Introduction to MESSAGE 30 and comments on Lev. 23:2 in MESSAGE 30, on Lev. 23:9 in MESSAGE 31; on Lev. 23:23 in MESSAGE 32, on Lev. 23:26 in MESSAGE 33, and on Lev. 23:33 in MESSAGE 34). Thus, the instructions that could have composed one MESSAGE were broken into five brief MESSAGES. The interruptions easily

could have been caused by efforts to deal with the man who cursed Jehovah. His offense would have been a cause serious enough to interrupt Moses even while He was receiving a new MESSAGE from God. The judges dealing with the offense could have interrupted Moses one time to report the offense to him and then interrupted him three other times to ask him questions about how to deal with it. Moses likely told them, if they would hold their questions until Jehovah was finished with His revelations for the day, he would ask the questions to Jehovah. After Jehovah finished His instructions about the holy assemblies, He gave some important instructions concerning the oil and THE bread for The Holy Place. Then Moses was able to present the questions to God for answers. His answers to those questions are recorded in this MESSAGE.

Because of these special circumstances, Section IV of the Book of Leviticus contains only this one MESSAGE. It is a kind of addendum to the MESSAGES about Israel's legal system that are found in MESSAGES 22, 23, and 24 (Lev. 18-20).

Critical Note

Considerable attention has been given to the placement of this MESSAGE in the Book of Leviticus. Many have contended that it was poorly placed because it deals with Israel's legal system and comes between one section that deals with Israel's religious system and another that deals with Israel's economic system. Thus, this one MESSAGE forms a separate section of the book all by itself. Those who are intent on finding evidence to support the theory of the gradual development of the book over many years contend that this MESSAGE was placed where it is by an awkward editor who was combining several documents into one. However, if we let the book speak for itself, no such arbitrary theory is necessary and nothing is strange about the location of the MESSAGE at this point. According to the MESSAGE itself, it is located in the book at the time it occurred chronologically. In fact, that explanation is the only satisfactory interpretation of the reason for its present location. An editor who was arranging materials that he had drawn from several sources certainly would have placed this MESSAGE with others on the same topic. The fact that it was not so placed is evidence that the book was not formed by an editor combining separate materials but by a reporter recording events as they occurred. The location of the MESSAGE is not logical from the point of view of the development theory, but it is perfectly logical from the point of view of the claims found in the book itself. Therefore, its location is actually strong evidence against the development theory and in favor of the claims of the book that it came into being from MESSAGES spoken by Jehovah and recorded by Moses just like Jehovah spoke them. The only reason to think otherwise is a belief that God cannot or would not speak in that manner. The problem with the critics is a failure to believe God did what the Bible says He did. Their problem is with their faith in God not in the factual evidence found within the book.
