

The Name of the LORD: A Sacred Trust

Leviticus 24:10-23

לֹא לִשְׁנֹא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex. 20:7)

Introduction

The first case law of invoking the LORD's name in a curse arose out of a specific historical situation, an incident most probably occurring shortly after the Exodus from Egypt.¹ The sequence of events leading up to this case law is as follows: A son of an Israelite woman by an Egyptian husband and a full-blooded Israelite man violently struggled against one another within the camp. During this conflict, the alien "blasphemed the Name and cursed" (NASB) in the presence of witnesses. Subsequently, "they brought him to Moses", whereupon he was confined until the LORD's will was ascertained in the matter.

This man's confinement was probably necessary because his unprecedented case involved two points that no previous revelation had been given: first, as to what should be the punishment of invoking the LORD's name during a curse; secondly, whether the law in such cases applied to an alien as well as to the native Israelite. Subsequently, the LORD Himself past judgment on both issues:

¹⁵"If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. ¹⁶Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death." NASB

The punishment for invoking the LORD's name during a curse is death without discrimination, whether for an Israelite or an alien. By such a severe penalty, the LORD establishes for all time the magnitude of this offense. The one who curses the LORD's name was to be purged from the camp. Israel was a theocracy, and anyone who did not esteem the Name of the LORD of that theocracy, was to be expunged by execution.

Among other issues, the following are addressed in this study. Why does Moses place this narration of blasphemy in the midst of sacred ceremonial scheduled observations? What does it mean to curse the name of the LORD? Is there a correlation between blaspheming the LORD's name here and that of the Spirit in Matthew 12:30-32? How does this case law apply to the Body of Christ today?

¹The third commandment in the Decalogue explicitly states: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Ex. 20:7; cf. Ex. 22:28). However, the punishment for blasphemy is not stated. This very well may be the first incident of blasphemy after the giving of the Decalogue and before Moses received the LORD's instruction about the punishment for cursing one's parents (Ex. 21:17).

Contextual Considerations

The literary placement of this incident seems to be out of sequence with its immediate context, appearing in the midst of instructions dealing with the sacred ceremonial scheduled observations (Sabbath [23:3]; Passover and Firstfruits [23:4-14]; Feast of Weeks [23:15-22]; Feast of Trumpets [23:23-25]; Day of Atonement [23:26-32]; Feast of Tabernacles [23:33-44]; the Lampstand [24:1-4]; Bread of the Presence [24:5-9]; **case concerning cursing [24:10-23]**; the Sabbatical Year [25:1-7]; and the Jubilee Year [25:8-34]). It is possible that this hideous case may have interrupted the LORD giving instruction to Moses concerning the ceremonial ritual of the sacred calendar. However, and more probable, the case concerning cursing is literarily and strategically placed in Leviticus for two important pedagogical reasons.

First of all, the entire year’s encampment at Sinai is recounted in a few chapters in Exodus and Numbers, but not in Leviticus. Not much of Leviticus is narration (namely 8:1—10:20 [“the fire narratives”] and 24:10-23 [“cursing the Name” narrative]), and therefore this interruption concerning cursing the Name is the more obvious in the midst of the cataloging annual calendar events. Generally, it serves to provide a timeless and solemn warning to Israel that the LORD’s name was their sacred trust throughout the year while keeping the holy calendar. The principle is simple: those who participate in the covenant must take extreme care not to repudiate the Author’s Name of that covenant. If they do, death by stoning must ensue to purge the guilty one from Israel.

Secondly, and more specifically, the only two narratives in Leviticus (8:1—10:20; 24:10-23) are strategically placed to divide the Book into three parts, with the proper laws concerning the sacrificial system that correspond to the wilderness Tabernacle [see Figure 1]—those that deal with the courtyard (1:1—7:38; 11:1—17:16); with the Holy Place (18:1—24:9); and the Holy of Holies (25:1—27:34) [Figure 2]. When these laws have been overlaid, as it were, in each compartment of the Tabernacle as prescribed by their position in Leviticus, they describe the actions that are performed in the appropriate place, or to describe the requirements for entry into it. Notably, the sequence of laws in Leviticus 1:1—7:38 continue in Leviticus 11, as those in 24:5-9 continue in Leviticus 25, as if they had not been suddenly interrupted by the narratives.

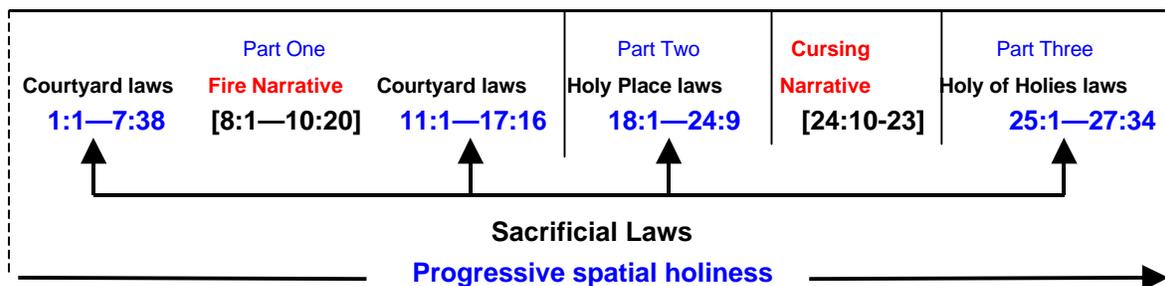
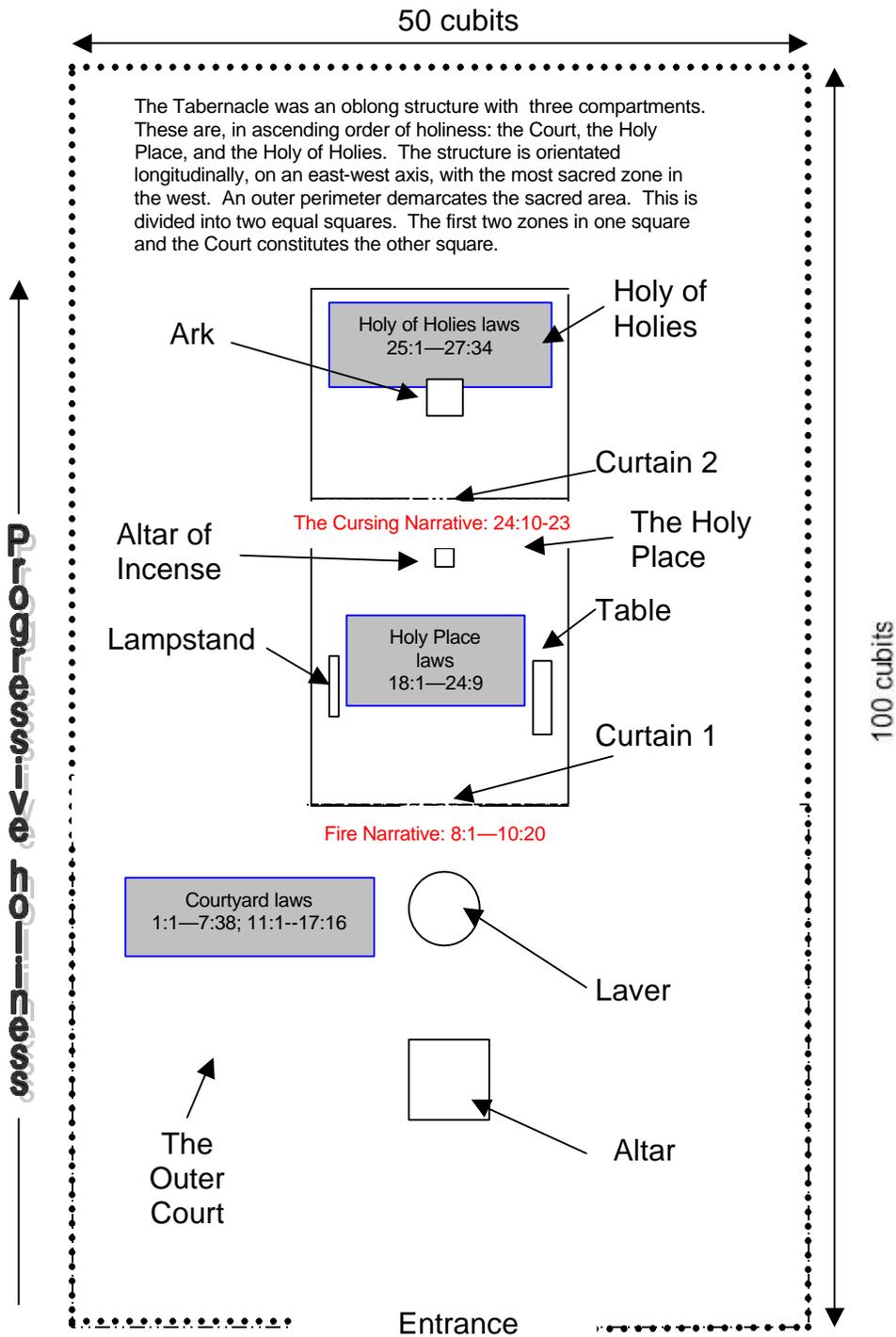


Figure 1.



Exodus recounts how beautifully the Tabernacle was made (Ex. 25:1—32:11), and the psalmist extols the House of God (Pss. 23:6; 27:4; 84:1, 4). Leviticus honors it in its own way. Leviticus begins with the LORD calling Moses to the entrance to the tent of meeting (Lev. 1:1), and the structure remains central throughout Leviticus, not just as the sacrificial laws that pertain to it, but the actual structure upon which the Book's literary architecture has been overlaid! Moreover, Leviticus' literary architecture is all the more amazing when observed that the amount of text describing the sacrificial laws performed in each compartment, are relative to the size of that chamber.

Exodus locates the holy furniture in their respective compartments (Courtyard, Holy Place, Holy of Holies) of the Wilderness Tabernacle; Leviticus prescribes what the purpose is for each item in their respective compartment. The two narrative "intrusions" are clearly breaches of the ordinances; the fire narrative (Lev. 8:1—10:20) is about breach of the holiness of the Tabernacle that lies behind the first curtain; the other (Lev. 24:10-23) a hurling insult against the Holy Name who dwells behind the second curtain. In both instances, they are clear warning that the LORD will not tolerate His people to approach Him sacrilegiously.

If this literary framework is accepted for the placement of the narratives, especially that of Leviticus 24:10-23 within the literary architecture of Leviticus, then we may conclude that this latter narrative precedes the ordinances that pertain to the Holy of Holies that lies behind the second curtain. It is here that the LORD sits above the mercy seat—the throne of Israel—against whom no one is allowed to invoke His Name in a curse without reciprocity.

Literary Considerations

This entire episode, as noted by several scholars, is carefully arranged literarily in a concentric pattern called chiasmus or palistrophe. Chiasmus may be defined as concentric or inverted parallelism whereby balanced statements produce a symmetrical design about a central or thematic idea. G. J. Wenham sets forth the structure and comments on the purpose of its symmetrical design:

- A resident alien and native Israelite (v. 16).
- B take a man's life (v. 17).
- C take an animal's life (v. 18).
- D whatever he did, must be done to him (v. 19).
- D' whatever . . . , must be done to him (v. 20d).
- C' kill an animal (v. 21a).
- B' kill a man (v. 21b).
- A' resident alien and native Israelite (v. 22).

"The symmetry and balance of this structure reinforces the points made explicitly in the text, namely, that in these cases the same penalty must be applied to both

resident alien and native Israelite (vv. 16, 22) and that in all cases the punishment must match the offense.”²

Expanding on Wenham’s work, the central idea that was excluded from his analysis in the chiasmic structure (“X”), may be extended (v. 20a-c). It is the “X” element that made this case law memorable, “tooth for tooth”, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 5:38.

- A Resident alien and native Israelite (v. 16).
- B take a man’s life (v. 17).
- C take an animal’s life (v. 18).
- D whatever he did, must be done to him (v. 19).
- fracture for fracture,**
- X eye for eye,**
- tooth for tooth (v. 20a-c).**
- D’ whatever . . . , must be done to him (v. 20d).
- C’ kill an animal (v. 21a).
- B’ kill a man (v. 21b).
- A’ resident alien and native Israelite (v. 22).

J. P. Fokkelman proposes the following structure for Leviticus 24:17-21b.

- C He who kills a man shall be put to death. (v. 17)
- D He who kills a beast shall make it good, life for life. (v. 18)
- E When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him, (v. 19)
- X fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth;** (v. 20a)
- E’ as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured. (v. 20b)
- D’ He who kills a beast shall make it good; (v. 21a)
- C’ and he who kills a man shall be put to death. (v. 21b)

Fokkelman comments on this structure: “There are, indeed, several texts in the OT which concern some kind of talio and which display a symmetry. Precisely one of the principal talionic texts, Lev. 24.17-21, appears to be concentric, and precisely the characteristic words “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”, the key formula by which one remembers the principle, are nicely in the middle. . . . For the sake of completeness it must be remarked that concentric composition is by no means restricted to texts about crime and punishment and that it is used both in prose and poetry.”³

The following literary proposal accounts for all the verses in the episode, beginning with an historical situation, and concluding with an epilogue.⁴

² G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 312.

³ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), p. 33.

⁴ An adaptation from Nils Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, pp. 57-58.

Introduction: Historical situation (Lev. 24:10-12)

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

“Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp,

A and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head;
then let all the congregation stone him.”

You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying,

B “If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin.”

“Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD, shall surely be
put to death;

C all the congregation shall certainly stone him.

The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put
to death.”

^a “If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to
death.

D ^b The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life

^c “If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be
done to him:”

“**fracture for fracture,**

X **eye for eye,**
tooth for tooth;”

^{c'} “just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him

D' ^{b'} Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good,

^{a'} but the one who kills a man shall be put to death.”

C' “There shall be one standard for you;
it shall be for the stranger as well as the native,”

B' “for I am the LORD your God”

Then Moses spoke to the sons of Israel,

A' and they brought the one who had cursed outside the camp
and stoned him with stones.

Epilogue: Thus the sons of Israel did, just as the LORD had commanded Moses (v. 23).

Many times when chiasmus is detected, the LORD’s words or a quotation from Him (a quotation in the New Testament from the Old Testament) forms the center, the “X” factor. Another common element that forms the core’s center is a triplet, as evident in verse 20: “fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth”.

The chiasmus of Leviticus 24:13-23 focuses on the principle of *lex talionis* as stated at the center, whereas the recounting of the incident of the mongrel Israelite’s “blasphemy” focuses on the law against cursing the name of the LORD. By employing this literary structure, our author highlights both a specific law and the principle underlying the laws of personal injury.

Once we have recognized the chiasmic structure of Leviticus 24:13-23 and its central theme about which our author has developed other related elements in concentric symmetry, we are on the correct path in understanding the purpose for the episode. By failing to observe and appreciate that symmetry, we will misread the “conceptual center” and consequently distort the author’s message, and miss the sense of balance and intensity that the original author desired.

The most important implication of chiasmic structuring of an episode is its bearing on *source criticism*. Source criticism tends to view the text through a microscope, breaking it apart into tiny pieces, which are then assigned customarily to J, E, or P. The literary approach pulls back the lens, and the wide-angle view results in a greater appreciation of how the literary creation works as a whole. Other literary considerations for the original inclusion and intrusive placement of this narrative within this chapter will be detailed elsewhere in the expository notes.

It will be sufficient to say that chiasmus provides a good foundation for arguing that a particular subsection of a larger text is not a later addition. Consequently, it also argues against a documentary source-critical approach to a text that radically cuts across the chiasmus. That is, if there is no plausible explanation of how a group of hypothetical sources were combined into an evident chiasmus, the hypothetical source documents probably never existed.

Another interesting example of chiasmus dealing with stoning occurs in Numbers 15:35-36. However, in this example, stoning is not because of blasphemy, but breaking the Sabbath. The word order reflects that of the Hebrew text.

- A Then the LORD said to Moses:
 - B the man shall surely be put to death
 - C they shall stone him with stones
 - D all the congregation outside the camp
 - X and they brought him**
 - D' all the congregation outside the camp
 - C' and stoned him with stones
 - B' to death
- A' just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

This is a very balanced chiasmus, with four lines devoted to the commandment and four to the execution, hinging on the obedience of the Israelites (X).

Outline

- I. The son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father violently struggles with an Israelite man in the camp wherein he “perforates” the name of the LORD in such a way that he curses it, with the result those in the camp confined him until the LORD’s will was determined in the matter (24:10-12).

- A. The son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father engages in a violent struggle with an Israelite man in the camp (v. 10).
- B. The son of an Israelite mother “perforates” the name and curses it, and is taken to Moses. The name and lineage of the son’s mother is detailed (v. 11).
 - 1. The son of an Israelite mother invokes the Name and curses, so they take him to Moses [for judgment] (v. 11a-b).
 - 2. The son’s mother is parenthetically identified as Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri from the tribe of Dan (v. 11c-e).
- C. Those in the camp confined him until the LORD’s will was determined (v. 12).
- II. The LORD instructs Moses to bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and after the witnesses have laid their hands upon his head, the entire congregation shall stone him to death, whether he be a native Israelite or an alien (24:13-16).
 - A. The LORD instructs Moses to take the one who cursed outside the camp, and after the witnesses of the cursing lay their hands on his head, the entire congregation is to stone him to death (vv. 13-15).
 - B. The punishment for perforating the Name is stoning to death; the punishment is to be thoroughly maintained without bias, whether an alien or a native Israelite blasphemes the Name (v. 16).
- III. Whether a resident foreigner or Israelite, degrees of retribution apply for the loss of human or animal life and injury, and form a comparison that clearly identifies the magnitude of the curser’s sin against the LORD (vv. 17-22).
 - A. Anyone who kills another person must be put to death (vv. 17, 21b).
 - B. Anyone who kills an animal compensates like restitution (vv. 18, 21a).
 - C. Anyone who injures his neighbor appropriately compensates (vv. 19-20).
 - D. This judicial standard applies to both the resident foreigner and Israelites (v. 21).
- IV. Under Moses’ instruction, the Israelites took the one who cursed outside the camp and stoned him (v. 23a-b).

Epilogue: The Israelites were obedient to the LORD’s word as spoken through Moses (v. 23c).

Expository and Exegetical Notes

Turning on a tragic chain of events, an unnamed man of mixed parentage invokes the Name of the LORD to render his Israelite opponent powerless against whom he was struggling. Subsequently, the LORD defends His Name with the severest punishment: death by stoning. Ironically, the Name invoked in the curse is the same Name who pronounces his punishment. In other words, the Name used by the man as a source of authority in his curse became unto him a curse by the authority of the same Name (*i.e.*, the curser is cursed). This case law establishes the timeless precedence for all future generations. No one, whether a resident alien or a native Israelite, may invoke the LORD’s name in a curse without the expectation of receiving just retribution.

***I. The community of worshippers must not tolerate
the one who invokes the LORD's Name in a curse (vv. 10-12).***

The entire episode may be divided between the sin and the punishment, with the historical introduction serving as the backdrop for the sin (vv. 10-12), and the LORD's decree of death by communal stoning as the punishment (vv. 13-23). The following exegetical notes carefully examine the events that led up to and articulate the particular sin the individual committed, so that God's people may be careful never to repeat it.

10 ^aNow the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the sons of Israel; ^band the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel struggled with each other in the camp. NASB

^aויצא בן־אשה ישראלית והוא בן־איש מצרי בתוך בני ישראל
^bוינצו במחנה בן הישראלית ואיש הישראלי: MT

Translation: ^aNow he went out, a son of an Israelitish woman, but he, the son of an Egyptian man, into the midst of the children of Israel; ^band they violently struggled in the camp, the son of the Israelitish and the Israelite man.⁵

Two unnamed men with explicit ancestral roots are the principle subjects of this verse. The first nameless man's initial action is that he **went out**.⁶ After his mixed parentage is articulated (sentence order of the Hebrew text), and the violent confrontation erupts **in the camp**, only then is another nameless man introduced with whom he **violently struggled in the camp**. This other nameless man is expressedly identified as an "Israelite man" in contradistinction with the first nameless man.

As the literal translation above indicates (NASB and most EVV translations obscure), the juxtaposition of the first man's mixed parentage with that where he went out, **into the midst of the children of Israel**, underscores something ominous. Whereas we might have expected the adverbial prepositional phrase to immediately follow the verb (*i.e.*, "he went out among the sons of Israel"; NASB), the Hebrew text interjects and positions the unnamed man's half-breed status between the principle verb and its adverbial prepositional phrase. His name is not important, nor is his father's; but that he was a son of an Israelitish woman and an Egyptian father is vitally important!

⁵ The author's translation of the Hebrew text maintains as closely as possible the original sentence order. A viable alternative to a translation (such as the KJV, NASB, RSV, etc.) is a literal translation. This type of translation will never enjoy popular reading, because of its necessary "wooden" rendering of the original wording and syntax. However, it must be noted, the principal aim for this literal translation is not for ease of reading, but a fervent desire to accurately reflect the original.

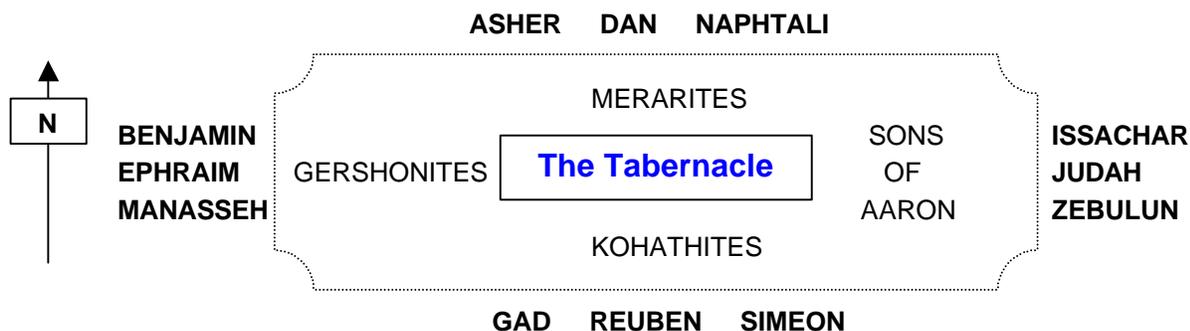
⁶ Henceforth, bold face type without quotation marks indicate this author's translation of the Hebrew text within the expository notes.

The anonymous man’s identity is described only by his parentage in verse 10: he had an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father. In between the two descriptive phrases, **the son of an Israelitish woman** and **the son of an Egyptian man**, the emphatic independent personal pronoun (והוא) occurs, accentuating the latter: **a son of an Israelitish woman, but he⁷ the son of an Egyptian man**. This mixed marriage, and thus the mongrel offspring, had deep theological implications within the nation of Israel.

Our author’s inclusion of this man’s parentage line is very important. He was the offspring of a mixed marriage whose parents had married before the exodus from Egypt, and thus he was part of the “mixed multitude” that accompanied the Israelites on their emigration to Canaan as stated in Exodus 12:38. Most importantly in this context, because he was considered an Egyptian, he was not allowed to enter into the assembly of the LORD as codified later in Deuteronomy 23:7-8:

“You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The sons of the third generation who are born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD”. NASB

But entered he did as indicated by **he went out and into the midst of the children of Israel**—the latter phrase emphatically placed at the end of the line (for structural reasons). As part of the mixed multitude, he and his family certainly resided outside of the encampment, for the tribal arrangement around the tabernacle (Num. 2:1-34; see also Num. 11:1-4) did not include the mixed multitude, as illustrated below.



The order of the twelve tribes are listed in four blocks of three, each with a leader, with each block orientated at one of the four compass points around the tabernacle.⁸ Therefore, the mixed multitude would be encamped outside the ring of the twelve tribes. In addition, when the people of Israel set out on their journey, they marched under their

⁷ The waw conjunction with the independent personal pronoun (והוא) is contrastive in juxtaposition of a man having an Israelitish mother and an Egyptian father: hence the translation, **but he**. Many times, English translations omit (overlook?) independent personal pronouns, and thus do not allow the reader to feel the contextual contrast that the original reader (of Hebrew) would.

⁸ It is well to keep in mind that here, in this quadrangular formation of Israel’s camp, some two million people lived, and that the quadrangle was about twelve miles square!

respective leaders in that order (Num. 10:13-28), thus leaving the mixed multitude following in the rear.⁹

The occasion for this incident may now be deduced what incited the violent struggle between these two men from the Hebrew syntax and the historical situation, although it is not explicitly stated in the text. The mongrel Israelite **went out** (יצא) from his encampment that was set apart from the main camp, and imprudently entered into the Israelite main camp where he did not belong, at which time a certain Israelite man confronted him.¹⁰ It is not recorded what was said between the two, but the outcome is clear, they **violently struggled in the camp**.

They **violently struggled** translates the relatively rare Hebrew verb, נָצַח, which means, “struggle, fight with” (BDB, 663; KB, 675). It occurs in the Niphal stem in Exodus 2:13; 21:22; Deuteronomy 25:11, and in the Hiphil in Numbers 26:9 (2x) and Psalm 60:2. These references indicate that the fighting was fierce. The Hebrew noun from this root, מַצָּח, means “strife, contention” (Isa. 58:4; Prov. 13:10; 17:19).

⁹ The ordering of the twelve tribes around the tabernacle is intriguing. For instance, why is Reuben on the south when he lived on the east? And why is Gad, another east bank tribe, listed with him on the south? Evidently geographic position is not being projected. It is evident that the tribes who were able to bear arms form the outer ring around the tabernacle. The Levites and their families form the inner ring. Mary Douglas in *In The Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Sheffield: JSOT Press [1993], pp. 175-181), comments on the official ordering of the tribes and peoples around the tabernacle: “The curses [Gen. 49] account for why Judah comes first in the order of the host around the tabernacle in Numbers: his elder brothers have been disgraced. . . . Levi has no place among the inheritors of the land, and the other two of the cursed sons of Leah, Reuben and Simeon, stand on the south, joined by Leah’s servant’s child, Gad. So the diagram makes it clear that cursed and low-ranking sons can stand together, on the north and the south, regardless of their birth place in the family. On the east and west, children of one mother, in correct birth order, face each other, Judah and his full brothers on the east, Ephraim and his brother and uncle on the west. By divine command the descendants of Rachel and Leah have been placed on opposite sides of the tabernacle, facing each other. . . . Kohath was the very family from which Aaron and Moses descended, their closest kinsmen. By giving to Moses and Aaron the eastern position in the camp and sending the other families of Kohath to the south, the Kohathites are made spatially equivalent to the disgraced sons of Jacob. The irony of history is here, since they are going to be disgraced as the story unfolds. . . . The placing of the Levite families around the tabernacle is followed by the allocation of their tasks. On the east, Moses and Aaron have charge of the tabernacle itself; on the west, Gershon handles the tabernacle tent and the hangings (Num. 3:25-27). This in itself shows by analogy that the placing of Ephraim on the west is not a move to shun or disinherit his people. On the south Kohath looks after the ark, the table, the lampstand, sanctuary vessels, the altars and the hangings (Num. 3:31-32). It is an honour, not a mark of servitude, that Kohath has the duty of carrying the ark on their shoulders. The act of carrying a burden is a metaphor for Moses’ relation to the people of Israel. When, in the next story section, the leaders presented six wagons and twelve oxen for the work of the tabernacle (Num. 7:3-9), Moses distributed them between the other Levite families, but refused to give any to the sons of Kohath, because their charge was to carry the holy things themselves (Num. 4:15). On the north, Merari has what must surely be the servants’ jobs, picking up and carrying the frames, the bars, the pillars, the sockets, pegs and cords (Num. 3:36-37), less honourable tasks than carrying the holy things and the ark itself.”

¹⁰ The Targum states that he attempted to set up his tent among the Danites because of his mother’s lineage (v. 11), but was justly opposed by an Israelite from that tribe. He was informed that because his father was an Egyptian, he had no part nor lot in the matter, but must look upon himself as a stranger.

Notably, the mother of the mongrel son is depicted by a very rare gentilic feminine adjective. She is called an “Israelitish woman” (אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית). This exact combination occurs only twice in the Hebrew canon, once in verse 10a and again in verse 11. In verse 10b, she is simply called the “Israelitish” (יִשְׂרָאֵלִית) without the further description of “woman”—the only occurrence in the Hebrew canon. This is all the more striking in a context that also employs the corresponding rare gentilic masculine form, יִשְׂרָאֵלִי (“Israelite”; only here and in 2 Samuel 17:25), who engage each other in a fierce fight. This, with other word choice considerations of our author, leads us to understand the overall integration of this episode with that of its context.

Under *Contextual* and *Literary Considerations* above, Moses’ purposeful placement of Leviticus 24:10-23 at this juncture and its internal literary artistry was briefly discussed. Although this passage is said to deviate from the surrounding context by biblical scholars, the chiasmus demonstrated below, based on the alternation of the plural and singular noun “son/sons” (בֵּן/בָּנִים), cannot be disputed.

This purposeful plural/singular arrangement of “son/sons” (בֵּן/בָּנִים) intricately interlinks the distinct parts of the regulations regarding the oil for the lampstand (vv. 2-3), instructions concerning the bread for the Table of Presence (vv. 5-9), and the case law narrative dealing with the one who cursed (vv. 10-23). In addition to the alternating interplay of the plural and the singular forms of “sons/son”, the common noun, “man” (אִישׁ) occurs only in E (בֶּן־אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם) and E’ (וְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵלִי), contrasting the national distinction between the two (Egyptian/Israelite), all the while enveloping and reinforcing the central focal point, X. Furthermore, the exact combination, “son of the Israelitish woman” (בֶּן־אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית), stunningly occurs only in D and D’. In the chart below, “P” stands for the plural form of “sons” (בָּנִים), and “S” stands for the singular (בֵּן).

2	P	sons of Israel		בני ישראל	A
8	P	sons of Israel		בני־ישראל	B
9	P	and to his sons		ולבניו	C
10a	S	son of an Israelitish woman		בן־אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית	D
10a	S	son of an Egyptian man		בֶּן־אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם	E
10a	P	sons of Israel		בני ישראל X	
10b	S	son of the Israelitish and the Israelite man	בן הישראלית ואיש ישראלי	E’	
11	S	son of the Israelitish woman		בן־אִשָּׁה הישראלית	D’
15	P	the sons of Israel		בני ישראל	C’
23a	P	the sons of Israel		בני ישראל	B’
23b	P	the sons of Israel		בני ישראל	A’

It is virtually impossible to argue that the above chiasmus is an unconscious accident. The above alternating interplay grouping pattern of the plural and singular forms of “sons/son” is 3 + 2 + 1//1 +2 +3. Surely the author assumed that his readers/hearers could make the above connections. But the modern reader may need some help to do so. The finely crafted parallels are not easy for a 20th century reader to

discern, but the ancient readers, presumably, was accustomed to spotting such things. These parallels carry a part of the theology as well as the artistry of the text. The text makes sense when read as a straight-line progression of ideas. An additional layer of meaning is available when the above structure is discerned.

Chiasmus is like the counterpoint in the music of Bach, where two melodies are interwoven into the same musical line. A vocal duet provides a similar parallel. The melody is clear, but the harmony enriches the artistry of the song and, in addition, aids in the interpretation of the song's meaning.

In like manner, the straight line sequence of Leviticus 24:1-23 can be likened to the melody of a song. When read from beginning to end as a progression of ideas, the text makes good sense. The flow of ideas is available to all and likely dominates any reader's consciousness when first exposed to the material. However, the "harmony line" adds both art and meaning to what is being said.

Finally, the literary homogeneity of Leviticus 24:1-23 is conclusively evident via chiasmus, and scholars who maintain a source composition for it have to provide an explanation for this unmistakable arrangement. Not only has Leviticus 24:10-23 been clearly demonstrated as a literary unit, but now, also an integral literary entity within the chapter. If any key word of the chapter have been inadvertently omitted or added by a copyist, the internal literary structure would not be balanced and therefore collapse.¹¹

Questions concerning Moses' authorial word choice and order in verse 10 now become clear. It has already been noted that the rare feminine gentilic adjective, "Israelitish" (ישראלית), only occurs three times in biblical Hebrew, twice in verse 10 and once in verse 11. However, only twice does it modify the noun, "woman" (vv. 10a,

¹¹ It should not go unmentioned that in Leviticus 25—26 the noun "son" is used ten times as plural and once in the singular (Lev. 25:2, 33, 41, 45, 46 (2x), 49, 54, 55; 26:29, 46. The chance that בן דודו ("the son of his uncle", Lev. 25:49) is only attested here in the Torah and in fact is the seventh occurrence in the series, is astronomical. Furthermore, in Leviticus 27 even the prepositions אל ("to"; A/A'), מן ("from"; B/B'; D/D'), and עד ("unto"; C/X/C') in relation to the noun, "son", have been chiasmically arranged:

A	to the sons of Israel (2)	A	אל בני ישראל (2)
B	from a son of twenty years (3)	B	מבן עשרים שנה (3)
C	and unto a son of sixty years (3)	C	ועד בן ששים שנה (3)
D	from a son of five years (5)	D	מבן חמש שנים (5)
X	unto a son of twenty years (5)	X	ועד בן עשרים שנה (5)
D'	from a son of a month (6)	D'	מבן חדש (6)
C'	and unto a son of five years (6)	C'	ועד בן חמש שנים (6)
B'	from a son of sixty years (7)	B'	מבן ששים שנה (7)
A'	to the sons of Israel (34)	A'	אל בני ישראל (34)

The beginning (A) and conclusion (A') of this chiasmatic structure is artfully enveloped by אל בני ישראל ("to the sons of Israel")—the only time in the literary arrangement that this exact prepositional phrase is used. In the scholarly debate regarding the puzzling position and structure of Leviticus 25—27, the structuring function of the common noun "son" underscores a deliberate literary plan at work—beyond the scope of conventional biblical and source criticism scholarship.

11a).¹² Why? Because if Moses had included the noun, “woman”, in verse 10b, then it would have disrupted the structure. Instead of balancing each other in D and D’, one simple additional word (“woman”) would have collapsed the composition’s continuity.

In addition, the rare masculine gentilic adjective, “Israelite” (יִשְׂרָאֵלִי), modifying the noun, “man” (אִישׁ; v. 10a),¹³ also functions as an important structural marker. It is racially antithetical to **son of an Egyptian man** (מִצְרַיִם [“Egyptian”, also a gentilic adjective modifying “man”; v. 10a]) as the two terms are likely to have been used at the time in the camp. The only other time יִשְׂרָאֵלִי (“Israelite”) is employed in the Hebrew canon, it is also used of a man of the ten tribes in opposition to the two (2 Sam. 17:25).

With the above in mind, the unexpected word order of verse 10a in the Hebrew text comes to light. If Moses had alternately positioned the adverbial prepositional phrase, בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (**into the midst of the children of Israel**), immediately following its verb, וַיֵּצֵא (**and he went out**), it would have dislocated the necessary placement of בֶּן־אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם (**son of an Egyptian man**) in E to balance אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל (**an Israelite man**) in E’. Furthermore, it would have also simultaneously disrupted the overall intricate chiasmic center (X; בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, **children of Israel**) of Leviticus 24!

An in depth discussion concerning the chiasmic center of Leviticus 24, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“children of Israel”, X; v. 10a), must be kept for another time. However, it is important to note that whereas the phrase is a common designation of the Israelites, its placement as the focal point in the milieu where sacred ceremonial scheduled observations are being set before the people and its immediate context of an individual’s cursing, is very significant. It only occurs here in this manner in all of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We now move to verse 11, wherein the half-Israelite’s sinned, and for which the LORD later (vv. 14-16) decrees the death penalty. There is discussion in scholarly publications as to what constituted this man’s sin. Therefore, our discussion will center on the questionable term(s) as to the lexical usage that represented the “blasphemous act”, as well as how Moses literarily incorporated them artfully within this episode.

In addition, since the sin focuses on the man using the LORD’s “Name” when he cursed, identifying the significance of the term will be crucial to our study. We will discover that the LORD’s name represents far more than an appellation—invoking His Name in a curse is a sin against His very character and nature as borne by His Name.

¹² Whereas the KJV rightfully italicizes “woman”, indicating that it is not in the text, the NASB, RSV and NRSV supply the noun without any indication of its originality. The NIV does not translate, but renders, “him”, as the object of a preposition (“between”) that does not occur in the text either!

¹³ The English phrase, “a certain Israelite” is a common idiomatic rendering of אִישׁ + הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִי.

11 ^aThe son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed. ^bSo they brought him to Moses. ^c(Now his mother’s name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) NASB

^aויקב בן־האשה הישראלית את־השם ויקלל
^bויביאו אותו אל־משה
^cושם אמו שלמית בת־דברי למטה־דן; MT

Translation: ^aAnd he pierced, the son of an Israelitish woman, the Name, and (so) he cursed. ^bThen they brought him to Moses. ^cNow the name of his mother, Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, belonging to the tribe of Dan.

As reflected above in the NASB translation of the first clause,¹⁴ the verb ויקב, translated as “blasphemed”, is understood to be from the verb קבב (“to execrate, blaspheme”), and not from נקב (“to pierce, name, designate”). Taken in isolation, the verb ויקב in v. 11a could be the Qal imperfect of either the double ‘Ayin root קבב or of the Pe Nun verb, נקב, for the consonants and the vowel pointing are identical.¹⁵ However, important and germane to our immediate context, the same verb occurs two other times in this passage (v. 16a, 16c) that help us to decide.

The Verbal Form	Parsed as if from קבב (“to curse, execrate, blaspheme”)	Parsed as if from נקב (“to pierce, name, designate”)
v. 11a ויקב	3ms Qal <i>waw</i> consecutive imperfect This verb could be parsed from קבב or . . . ←	3ms Qal <i>waw</i> consecutive imperfect This verb could be parsed from נקב or . . . →
v. 16a ונקב	PARSING IMPOSSIBLE The form would have been נקב (not attested in biblical Hebrew).	ms Qal active participle (cannot be read differently even in an unpointed text)
v. 16c בנקבו	PARSING IMPOSSIBLE The form would have been בנקבו (not attested in biblical Hebrew).	Qal infinitive construct + 3ms suffix with ב prefix (cannot be read differently even in an unpointed text)

¹⁴ English translations traditionally break apart v. 11—one sentence in the Hebrew—into three. Thus, my usage of “clause” for v. 11a is from the Hebrew perspective, not that of the English sentence division.

¹⁵ Beginning Hebrew students are all too familiar with this problem with other Hebrew words. For instance, ירא by form may either be ms Qal active participle from ירא (“to fear”; cf. Gen. 22:12), or 3ms Qal *waw* consecutive imperfect from ראה (“to see”; cf. Gen. 22:13). Only context will determine which verb the author meant.

Although ambiguity exists for the verbal root in verse 11a, it is amply clear from the evidence cited above that the Hebrew verbs, ונקב (v. 16a) and בנקבו (v. 16c), are derived from the same verbal root as ויקב in verse 11a. This is because the verbal forms, ונקב (v. 16a) and בנקבו (v. 16c), cannot be parsed as deriving from קבב, but only from נקב!¹⁶ Furthermore, since the verbal root נקב (“to pierce, name, designate”) occurs twice more without question in verses 16a and 16c in the new law later decreed by divine decree as a result of the incident in verse 11a, it logically follows then, that נקב must also be understood in verse 11a.¹⁷

- v. 11a “The son of the Israelite woman perforated¹⁸ (ויקב) the Name”
- v. 16a “Moreover the one who perforates (ונקב) the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death”
- v. 16c “The alien as well as the native, when he perforates (בנקבו) the Name, shall be put to death.”

The LXX also understood and confirms that the same verbal root, נקב, in all three instances by employing the verbs ἐπινομάζω (“call by a name; pronounce a name”)¹⁹ in verse 11a, and the present active participle and the aorist active infinitive of

¹⁶ The Hebrew concordances also concur that all three verbal forms, ויקב (v. 11a), ונקב (v. 16a), and בנקבו (v. 16b) are derived from נקב and not from קבב (Lisowsky, p. 953; Mandelkern, p. 765). It is enigmatic that Beall and Banks’ Hebrew parsing guide improperly parses ויקב as being from קבב in Lev. 24:11a, and then switch to נקב in vv. 16a and 16b! What is even more perplexing, is that they assign to the latter two a definition of “curse”; a definition that is not attested anywhere in its semantic domain (*Old Testament Parsing Guide: Genesis—Esther*, pp. 101-102; J. J. Owens in his *Analytical Key to the Old Testament: Vol. 1, Genesis-Joshua*, pp. 539-40, follows suit).

¹⁷ This is the same logical conclusion that J. Weingreen comes to in his article, “The Case of the Blasphemer”, p. 118. The modern Hebrew lexical-dictionaries discuss this issue, while at the same time, strain to make נקב to mean “curse” or “blaspheme”. For example, in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, states: “Five times in the q. [sic Qal] the root seems to signify designate something as bad, i.e., to curse or blaspheme, though this sense for the root is not without question. In three of these occurrences morphological ambiguity clouds the analysis. The impf. or prefix conjugation is used: y!qq+B | hW (2x Job 3:8; Prov 11:26) and w-Π!Q)B (Lev 24:11). Morphologically, these spellings could be transitive forms of a q. impf. of the root *nqb* or the root *qbb*, curse. Such a quasi-Aramaic spelling of the q. impf. of the root *qbb*, where the first root consonant is doubled, is not uncommon among geminate roots in BH. That the root *nqb* carries a sense of curse or blaspheme seems clearer in Lev 24:16, where both a q. act. part (*n*)*q@B*) and q. inf. const. occur after the ambiguous impf. form and the root *qll*, curse, and where the textual environment demands a sense of blaspheme for this root. These occurrences argue for the probability that *nqb* underlies the three morphologically ambiguous forms, though the root *qbb* must remain a possibility. The three occurrences in Leviticus (Lev. 24:11, 16 [2x]) refer to a disrespectful or inappropriate treatment of Yahweh’s name” (Vol. 3: 149-50).

¹⁸ To avoid confusion later, נקב is rendered in my literal translation as “perforate”, and not as “blasphemed” as in many translations, including the NASB.

¹⁹ Liddell and Scott, p. 676.

ὀνομάζω (“call someone something; name or call with reference to”)²⁰ in verses 16a and 16c, respectively.²¹ If the LXX had understood the verbal root to originate from קבב, they would have translated with one of the following verbs: ἀράομαι (Num. 22:11; 23:8); καταράομαι (Num. 23:8, 13, 25, 27; 24:10); or ἐπικαταράομαι (Num. 22:17), as they did in other instances where קבב occurs in biblical Hebrew.

The Hebrew verb, נקב, only has as its semantic domain, “to bore through, perforate, stipulate, determine, name, designate” (KB, p. 678-79).²² Not one Hebrew lexicon suggests that נקב denotes “to blaspheme” as a possibility. There is a very good reason: נקב does not mean “to blaspheme/execrate”. However, it is probable that the English translations did not understand נקב to mean “to blaspheme, execrate” in verse 11,²³ but more probable, mistakenly identified the improper root from which ויקב was derived (קבב). If this is correct, then how can translations in good conscience render ויקב (v. 16a) and ויקב (v. 16b) as “blaspheme”, when it is absolutely impossible to derive these forms from נקב?

Because of the mistaken identification of the correct Hebrew root in verse 11a (קבב > ויקב), many English translations have erroneously translated it as “blasphemed/execrate”. This is why some translations differ at this juncture.

Translations that **improperly** render ויקב in verse 11a as deriving from קבב are:

- KJV “and the Israelitish woman’s son blasphemed the name of the LORD”
- NASB “the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name”
- RSV “and the Israelite woman’s son blasphemed the Name”
- NRSV “the Israelite woman’s son blasphemed the Name”
- NJB “the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name”
- YLT “and the son of the Israelitish woman execrateth the Name”
- LTHB “and the son of the woman of Israel blasphemed the Name”

A few English translations correctly render ויקב in verse 11a as deriving from נקב, and translate accordingly:

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1232-33.

²¹ The LXX confirms the Hebrew root as נקב. Although the LXX stays within the semantic domain of the root (followed by the English translations, NEB and NJPS), it is argued in this essay that the LXX should have translated נקב with τετραίνειν (“to bore through, pierce, perforate” [Liddell & Scott, 1780]), as they did in 2 Kgs. 12:9(10), 18:21 and Isa. 33:6, or with διακόπειν (“to cut through”, *ibid.*, 398), as in Hab. 3:14.

²² The masculine noun, נקב, is a jeweller’s technical term, denoting a hole or cavity, whereas the feminine noun, נקבה, refers to a female (that which is pierced).

²³ However, if not, their probable justification for their translation would go something like this: “The stem נקב means ‘to perforate’ or ‘to pierce’, and by extension, ‘to specify’, ‘to designate’, and by extension ‘to name insultingly’.” Commentators also have tried in vain to explain how נקב should be translated as “blaspheme” (see notes on verse 13). A technical term for “blaspheme” that Moses used in a parallel passage (Num. 15:30) was גדר, resulting in the one who was guilty to be cut off from his people.

- NEB “. . . an Israelite of pure descent. He uttered the Holy Name”²⁴
- NJPS “the son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name”

However, even these translations of נקב fall sadly short. How can one justify that by “uttering” or “pronouncing” the Name deserves death by stoning? In other words, there is nothing obvious to connect the punishment of death by stoning for “uttering” the Name, especially in an infamous text that legislates *lex talionis* for certain offenses. Furthermore, realizing correctly that נקב does not mean “to blaspheme” (and that the verb is not קבב), several commentators posit that נקב functions as a circumlocution (or euphuistic) for ארר (“curse”). While this sounds appealing, it falls short of contextual reasons why נקב should not be translated as more naturally as “pierced/perforated”.

The following exhaustive concordance²⁵ listing of נקב clearly indicates that the verb means “to pierce/perforate” or “to mark out/designate”—and nothing more.

נקב in the Qal: to bore, to pierce/perforate

ויקב חר בדלתו	2 Kgs. 12:9(10)	. . . and <u>bored</u> a hole in its lid
ובא בכפו ונקבה	18:21	. . . it will go into his hand and <u>pierce</u> it
ובא בכפו ונקבה	Isa. 36:6	. . . it will go into his hand and <u>pierce</u> it
אל־יצרור נקוב	Haggai 1:6	. . . to a purse <u>perforated</u>
נקבת במטיו	Habakkuk 3:14	. . . You <u>pierced</u> with his spears
במוקשים ינקב־אף	Job 40:24	. . . with barbs can anyone <u>pierce</u> [his] nose
ובחוז תקוב לחיו	40:26(41:2)	. . . with a hook <u>pierce</u> his jaw

נקב in the Qal: to mark out, designate

נקבה שכרך עלי ואתנה	Gen. 30:28	. . . <u>designate</u> your wages and to me I will pay
ויקב . . . אתהשם	Lev. 24:11	. . . and he <u>pierced</u> . . . the name
ונקב שם־יהוה מות יומת	24:16	. . . and the <u>one piercing</u> the name of the LORD shall surely die
בנקבו־שם יומת	24:16	. . . when his <u>piercing</u> [the] name shall die
אשר פי יהוה יקבנו	Isa. 62:2	. . . which the LORD <u>shall designate</u>
נקבי ראשית הגוים	Amos 6:1	. . . <u>distinguished</u> ones first of the nations

נקב in the Niphal: to be designated

אשר נקבו בשמות	Num. 1:17	. . . who had been <u>designated</u> by name
כלם נקבו בשמות	Ezra 8:20	. . . all of them <u>designated</u> by name
נקבו בשמות	1 Chr. 12:32	. . . <u>designated</u> by name
אשר נקבו בשמות	16:41	. . . who were <u>designated</u> by name
אשר־נקבו בשמות	2 Chr. 28:15	. . . who were <u>designated</u> by name

²⁴ The NEB interjects the adjective “Holy” before “Name”, writing both words with capital letters.

²⁵ Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz Zum Hebraischen Alten Testament*, p. 953.

אשר נקבו בשמות

31:19 . . . who were designated by name

From the above exhaustive listing of נקב in the Hebrew Scriptures, it may be safely concluded that the verbal forms ויקב in Leviticus 24:11 and ונקב in verse 16 carry no explicit meaning beyond than the half-Israelite distinctly “pierced, perforated” or “designated, marked out” the revealed Name of God. So, what is the basis for translating נקב as “blaspheme”? Except for translation tradition or ignorance, there is no semantic and linguistical reason. It is enough said that the verb נקב, translated as “blaspheme”, does not accurately represent the meaning of the Hebrew verb.²⁶

Let us continue with the exegesis of the verse at hand. From the NASB translation of verse 11a (because of required English order), it appears that the verbs “and he blasphemed” [*sic* “pierced/perforated”] and “cursed” appear relatively close in the text (“The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed”). However, upon further scrutiny of the original Hebrew sentence order, analysis illustrates they could not be any further apart in the clause. Below is an interlinear text to demonstrate the verbs, “and he pierced” [ויקב <], occurs first in the clause, whereas, “and cursed” [ויקלל >], appears last. Remember, Hebrew is read from right to left.



By Moses placing these two verbs at the extremities of the clause, the subject and object are sandwiched between them. Sentence order suggests “the name” (את-השם) is the object of “and he pierced/perforated” (ויקב; cf. v. 15). Furthermore, it should be noted that ויקב is only one part of the verbal chain, for ויקלל (“and he cursed”) in verse 11a (as a *waw* consecutive after ויקב), most probably further defines נקב in some way.

In addition, the inverted structural order of נקב and קלל in verse 11 avoids using “the LORD” (the tetragrammaton) as the object of קלל (by inverting its object, את-השם, [“the name”] with its verb), and simultaneously removing it as far as possible from נקב! This verbal order is very important (ויקב . . . ויקלל), because their combined seven-fold occurrence (נקב, 3x; קלל, 4x) clearly forms a seven-part, alternating verb-order, demonstrating a tight literary structure in the passage. The following chiasmic pattern once again interlinks verses 10-23 as one literary unit:

²⁶ As the passage unfolds, Moses’ word choice of נקב will become very clear. It was not simply “uttering/pronouncing” or “designating” the LORD’s name that constituted the offense (as traditional Judaism maintains, and as some English versions translate), but “piercing, perforating” the Name that constituted cursing the Name. This passage of Scripture reveals that the nature of punishment (stoning) accords well with the offense (cursing). The one who pierces the Name will be pierced with stones.

11a	A	and he <u>pierced</u> the name	וַיִּקַּב אֶת־הַשֵּׁם A
11a	B	and he <u>cursed</u>	וַיִּקְלַל B
14	C	bring the one who <u>cursed</u>	הוֹצֵא אֶת־הַמְקַלֵּל C
15		X <u>curses his God</u>	וַיִּקְלַל אֱלֹהָיו X
16a	C'	and <u>pierces</u> the name of the LORD	וַיִּקַּב שֵׁם־יְהוָה C'
16b	B'	when he <u>pierces</u> the Name	בְּנִקְבוֹת־שֵׁם B'
23	A'	they brought the one who <u>cursed</u>	וַיּוֹצִיאוּ אֶת־הַמְקַלֵּל A'

It will be noted from this alternating verbal structure, and the sentence order of verse 11a, Moses was very careful to avoid using the tetragrammaton (יהוה; “LORD”) as the clear object of נקב, and especially קלל. Thus arises part of the ambiguity of verse 11. Only two instances in the Hebrew Scriptures does קלל have אלהים (“gods”/“judges”) as its object²⁷: Leviticus 24:15 and Exodus 22:27(28),²⁸ and never the tetragrammaton (יהוה, “LORD”). The verbal parallelism, A/A’: ויקב, המקלל, B/B’: ויקלל, בנקבו, and C/C’: המקל, ונקב is not by accident. It suggests these verbs function coordinately, though not as an hendiadys,²⁹ for the central element, and the explicit term for “curse” (X: ויקלל), has no counterpart.³⁰

From the above verbally balanced literary structure, these alternating verbs are to be explained by each other, one leading to the other, and not two completely distinct acts. Thus the man did something that resulted in something else: he pierced the Name with the result that he cursed.³¹

In the major Hebrew stems, the verb “to curse” (קלל) means “to be swift, slight, be lightly esteemed,” “curse” *i.e.*, treat with contempt (BDB, 886; THAT 2:641-43).³²

²⁷ Hartley notes that “1 Sam. 3:13 is considered by most textual critics to be a third reference. The MT reads להם, ‘to them’, in place of אלהים (‘God’). The MT is considered to be one of the *tiqqune sopherim*, *i.e.*, a text in which the scribes have changed an offensive or embarrassing reading, such as one that is too anthropomorphic, to an easier reading” (Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 409).

²⁸ There is no reason to doubt that אלהים refers to those in Ex. 21:6; 22:8, 28 as “judges”—judges insofar as they represented God, the divine judiciary. This is also probably the meaning of Deut. 21:23.

²⁹ Hendiadys is a figure of speech in which a single complex idea is expressed by two words connected by a conjunction. “Hendiadys”, comes from three Greek terms: “one”, “by”, and “two”: literally, *one by means of two*. Two words are used, but one meaning intended. One of the two words expresses the idea, and the other intensifies it and made especially emphatic. Hendiadys always raises the qualifying word to the superlative degree. It is found in Latin, and is very frequently employed in both in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, pp. 657-672.

³⁰ It should be noted at this time, that the only time the proper name, “God” (אלהים) is designated as the object of “curse” (קלל), is strikingly found at the fulcrum of this literary structure!

³¹ The second verb in verse 11a, ויקלל (> קלל; 3rd masculine singular, Piel imperfect + *waw* consecutive), most probably indicates the result in which the accused “pierced” “the Name”, resulting in cursing. The resultant action is confirmed in verse 15 wherein the verb קלל stands without parallel to נקב (see the seven-fold literary analysis of these two verbs on page 20).

³² A through lexical study of קלל substantiates these attributed meanings to the verb. In the Qal, “to be swift”: 2 Sam. 1:23; Jer. 4:13; Haggai 1:5; Job 7:6; 9:25; “to be light, lightly esteemed”: Gen. 8:8, 11; 16:4, 5; 1 Sam. 2:30; Nahum 1:14; Job 40:4. In the Niphal, “to show oneself swift”: Isa. 30:16; “to be light,

There are approximately forty-three occurrences of קלל with the meaning, “curse” in the Hebrew Scriptures. One may curse authority figures, whether God, parents, or a king (Ex. 21:17; 22:28[27]; Lev. 20:9; 23:15; 2 Sam. 16:5-13). A most notable example is the one (note the singular) who “curses” (קלל) Abram in Genesis 12:3, which in turn the LORD will curse (אָרַר)³³:

12a And-I-shall-bless ones-blessing-you	וואַברכה מברכיך 12 ^a
12b but-one-cursing-you I-shall-curse	ומקללך אָרַר 12 ^b
12c and-they-will-be-blessed in-you all-of peoples of-the-earth.	ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה 12 ^c

The verb's primary meaning is “to be [made] light or slight”. It is used of Hagar's evaluation of Sarah (Gen. 16:4-5). Sarah was not lowered in position as Abram's wife, but lowered in function and prestige.³⁴ Likewise, Nehemiah asserted a curse formula and saw it effected on those who had married foreign women by publicly disgracing them (Neh. 13:25ff.). If one attacked God's prophet verbally to vilify his character, he was cursed. This was the case with the boys and Elisha (2 Kgs. 2:24ff.), wherein they were cursed by the prophet in the Name of the LORD (ויקללם בשם יהוה) so that two she-bears came out of the wood and mauled forty-two of them. Furthermore, in biblical Hebrew it means to “treat badly” (Lev. 19:14), “intend a lowered position” (Ps. 62:4), or to “insult” (2 Sam. 16:5ff). As we will see in our passage, the ultimate offense is to rob God of His honor by making light or slighting His character—the penalty is death by stoning (Lev. 24:15).

Two other times in this passage (vv. 14, 23) קלל is used without an object. “The reluctance of the ancient Israelite authors to use a name of God with קלל is very evident”.³⁵ It is clear that **the Name**³⁶ is a substitute and equivalent to “the LORD”

unimportant”: 1 Sam. 18:23; 2 Sam. 6:22; 1 Kgs. 16:31!; 2 Kgs. 3:18; 20:10; Isa. 49:6; Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ezk. 8:17; Prov. 14:6. In the Piel, “to curse”: Gen. 8:21; 12:3; Ex. 21:17; 22:27; Lev. 19:14; 20:9 (2x); 24:11, 14, 15, 23; Deut. 23:5; Joshua 24:9; Judg. 9:27; 1 Sam. 3:13; 17:43; 2 Sam. 16:5, 7, 9, 10 (2x), 11, 13; 19:22; 1 Kgs. 2:8; 2 Kgs. 2:24; Isa. 8:21; Jer. 15:10; Pss. 102:5; 109:28; Job 3:1; Prov. 20:20; 30:10, 11; Eccl. 7:21, 22; 10:20 (2x); Neh. 13:2; 13:25. In the Pual, “to be cursed”: Ps. 37:22; Job 24:16. In the Hiphil, “to lighten”: Ex. 18:22; 1 Sam. 6:5; 1 Kgs. 12:4, 9, 10; Jonah 1:5; 2 Chron. 10:4, 9, 10; “to despise”: 2 Sam. 19:44; Isa. 8:23; 23:9; Ezk. 22:7. In the Pilpel, “to shake”: Ezk. 21:26; “to sharpen”: Eccl. 10:10. In the Hitpalpel, “to be shaken”: Jer. 4:24. Listing is from Lisowsky, p. 1260.

³³ The distinction between the verbs קלל and אָרַר in Genesis 12:3 is that, “the one who curses (קלל) you [pronounces a formula], I will curse (אָרַר) him [place him in a state].” The distinctions between these two verbs in biblical Hebrew have been thoroughly worked out by H. C. Brichto, *The Problem of “Curse” in the Hebrew Bible* (JBL Monograph Series, vol. XIII, 1963).

³⁴ As J. Weingreen has pointed out, “the writer was referring, not to Hagar's assumed arrogance towards her mistress but, to Sarah's having lost status, because of the new standing which Hagar had acquired through her pregnancy. At the risk of appearing pedantic I suggest that a more exact translation would be ‘her mistress became contemptible in her (Hagar's) estimation.’” (pp. 119-120).

³⁵ John Hartly, *Leviticus*, p. 409.

³⁶ The KJV adds “of the Lord” in italize to indicate what is implied, but not expressed in the Hebrew.

(יהוה) because of the presence of the definite article³⁷ and the entire context of the passage (see v. 16).³⁸ In addition, in Deuteronomy 28:58b, the direct object particle את is repeated before “the name” and “the LORD your God”, being one and the same object of the verbs “honor” and “fear”. Thus, **the Name** that the man slighted was no less than the Tetragrammaton, YHWH (יהוה). It is the Name by which God revealed Himself in covenant for Israel’s redemption. It is also this Name whereby the LORD revealed His character and reputation (cf. Ex. 3:15; 34:14). In the Psalms His name is inseparable with all the attributes that benefit mankind: His righteousness (89:15, 16); faithfulness (89:24); salvation (96:2); holiness (99:3); goodness (100:4, 5); mercy (1909:21); love (119:55); truth (138:2); and glory (148:13).

The LORD put His name in the sanctuary (Deut. 12:5, 21). It is His reputation among His people; He jealously guards His name among the nations (Ezk. 36:22-32). When His prophets are sent in His name (Deut. 18:20), they carry His personal authority as if He were there Himself. In fact, “the name of the LORD” is often considered a designation of His actual presence. It equals the LORD in all that fullness of divine power, holiness, wrath, and grace which He revealed as His character (Jer. 10:6; Ps. 76:1).

Thus, **the Name** stands for God’s essential nature revealed as an active force in the lives of His people. To curse **the Name** is to lower the LORD to a status lower than He rightfully deserves, to treat it in contempt. To do so is to profane it (cf. Ezk. 36:21ff.), or to pollute it (cf. Jer. 34:16). However, in the context of Leviticus 24:10-23, cursing the name was the result of the mongrel piercing/perforating it in the first place.

How does one pierce/perforate the name of the LORD? It would be accomplished by denigrating (*i.e.*, perforating it with the intent of debilitating a person) in any fashion the character and nature of the LORD. “The transgressor spoken of in these verses attempts to take such action against his adversary. He ‘pierces’ the Lord’s name and declares Him to be without content or significance, thereby intending to render the Israelite man powerless. . . . The guilty person here therefore did not pronounce a curse in our sense of the word, but rather attacked the Lord’s holy nature and declared this to be without content or significance.”³⁹ Whether he cursed his Israelite opponent using **the Name** or cursed **the Name** itself is difficult to know. Based on a passage in the Mishnah (*Sanh. 7.5*), Livingston concludes that the reason this case was treated so seriously was that the offender cursed the LORD with the very name of the LORD.⁴⁰

³⁷ The article before “name” (השם) may be in reference to a well-known name (*i.e.*, “the LORD”). However, in light of Deuteronomy 28:58, the context would suggest the superlative use of the article.

³⁸ In this passage, as well as others, “the Name” is substituted and equivalent to represent יהוה (Ex. 20:24; Deut. 12:5, 11).

³⁹ A. Nordtzij, *Leviticus*, p. 245.

⁴⁰ D. H. Livingston, “The Crime of Leviticus xxiv 11”, p. 353.

Because of what the man did, cursing **the Name**, **they brought him to Moses** (ויביאו אותו אל-משה, v. 11b).⁴¹ Was it only the witnesses (cf. v. 14), or did others also bring him to Moses? We are not told. At the very least, it would have included those who had witnessed this man cursing **the Name**. Otherwise, other than a generic use of the third person plural suffix (יביאו, “they brought”), no immediate contextual antecedent may be established.

This is the first time in the narrative the unnamed man is identified independently, not being associated with any parentage affiliation. Extraordinarily he has always been identified with his mother (**son of an Israelitish woman**, vv. 10a, 11a; **son of the Israelitish**, v. 10b), or with his Egyptian father (**but He, son of an Egyptian**, v. 10a). Uniquely, he is at this time somberly alone, indicated by the separate direct object pronoun, **him** (אתו [את + ו]). Literarily, the independent direct object pronoun places distance between the subject (“they”) of the verb (“brought”), and who they brought—**him**. Our author could have used the 3rd masculine singular direct object pronominal suffix with “they brought” (*i.e.*, יבואנו), fusing “they brought” and “him” into one Hebrew word. However, he chose rather to separate them: **they brought—him**.⁴²

Because the half-Israelite cursed **the Name**, the people consulted Moses, their mediator and lawgiver, for instruction in what to do. It is clear from the entire tenor of this passage what the man did was unprecedented, and thus the people could not determine the degree of the man’s guilt and punishment. If he had been a full-blooded Israelite, the punishment for his offense would have been beyond question—execution. However, his father was an Egyptian (v. 10b), one of the mixed multitude who went out with the Israelites when they left Egypt (Ex. 12:38), having married Shelomith (perhaps some twenty years earlier), a woman from the tribe of Dan (v. 11c).⁴³

It would have been more natural for our narrator to report immediately what had occurred when the people brought the unnamed man to Moses. However, we are not enlightened until the half-Israelite mother’s name, her father’s name, and the tribe to which she belonged are first specified (v. 11c). A literary disjuncture ostensibly occurs:

⁴¹ The conclusion that the people brought the man to Moses because of his cursing the Name is highlighted by the juxtapositioning of the two verbs, ויקלל ויביאו, “He cursed so they brought”. The translation of the *waw* as “so they brought” (ויביאו) is therefore justifiable.

⁴² This author unabashedly maintains that both word choice and word order is instructive for understanding the inspired Text. Word choice or order is not a product of “stylistic changes” by the human author, but reflects the mind and will of God.

⁴³ “Mixed multitude” (KJV) translates, ערב רב, which certainly included Egyptians, some who “feared the word of the LORD” (Ex. 9:20; cf. Ex. 12:43; Num. 11:4; Deut. 29:10; Josh. 8:35). Also, these people may have been some of the old Semitic peoples left from the Hyksos era and slaves native to other countries. ערב means to be of mixed race, as Nehemiah 13:3 demonstrates, as the half-breed descendants of mixed marriages between Israelites and other people from different nations were expelled. Mixed marriages were not tolerated after the Exile, in that the “holy race” became intermingled with the peoples of the lands” (Ezra 9:2; also 9:1—10:44).

- 11b: So they brought him to Moses.
11c: **Now his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.**
12a: and they placed him in custody . . .

The unexpected interruption (more like an eruption) of added genealogical information in verse 11c is felt so acutely by some, that it is surmised as an addition by a later scribe.⁴⁴ However, there is a better literary alternative, one that both explains the intrusion of verse 11c between verses 11b and 12a, and the significance of the unnamed man's mother's name, her father's name, and tribal affiliation.⁴⁵

The *seven* Hebrew words expressed in verse 11c (וּשְׁם אִמּוֹ שְׁלֹמִית בַּת־דִּבְרִי (למטה-דין)), introduced by a *waw* disjunctive, establish unquestionably the half-Israelite's lineage on his mother's side to the third generation. Several questions needed to be asked to point us in the right direction are:

- How do these names contribute to the development of the passage?
- Why are their names and tribal affiliation mentioned at this time (between vv. 11b and 12a), especially when we consider that the man and his father's names remain anonymous throughout this passage?
- Is it more important for us to know this piece of genealogy, or what the names might suggest in a passage that speaks of restitution and judgment in the immediate following context?

One commentator suggests "the mention of the mother's name and pedigree would identify her for future generations, and remind the mothers of Israel to bring up their children in the fear of God".⁴⁶ Whereas this proposal may have merit concerning the mother's name, it falls flat why our author includes also her father's name and their tribal affiliation. In addition, this genealogical tidbit would have had the same moral impact as if it had been placed as part of the introduction in verse 10.

It is plausible to suggest that the positioning of verse 11c between verses 11b and 12a has the advantage of retarding (from the hearers/readers' standpoint) the ongoing narrative story line. The *waw* disjunctive (וּשְׁם) that introduces the verbless clause of verse 11c, momentarily pauses between the quick succession of the preceding action, and the subsequent action of the people bringing the man to Moses. This then, would serve as a deliberate literary ploy to give the sense of the necessary time delay. However, there is much more of an immediate purpose for this genealogical intrusion.

⁴⁴ Martin Noth, *Leviticus*, pp. 179-180.

⁴⁵ It is striking that most commentators do not make any observations on Leviticus 24:11b! The only one found to date to made significance comments was Mary Douglas (*Leviticus As Literature*, pp. 207-208).

⁴⁶ R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, p. 221.

The **name of his mother** was **Shelomith** (שלמית), and her father's, **Dibri** (דברי). These names are not mentioned in Leviticus again, nor occur again in biblical literature. So why was it so important for our author to make a point about them now? Upon further reflection, it may be that our author is making intentional wordplays on these names. **Shelomith** (שלמית) suggests “retribution” (שלמה; Ps. 91:8), or “restitution” (שלם) as found later in Leviticus 24:18, 21. **Dibri** (דברי) may suggest “(legal) case” (דברה; Job 5:8).⁴⁷ Furthermore, by his mother, he belonged **to the tribe of Dan**, which suggests “judgment” or “vindication” (דין).⁴⁸ To disregard these possible wordplays would be unwise, especially since biblical authors employ wordplays on names when they have something to do with what is related.⁴⁹ In this case, these names “coincidentally” form a commentary, focusing upon the central theme about which the entire passage revolves (X, “fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth”, v. 20a [see literary structure on page 6]), and foreshadow what is yet to occur.

12 ^aThey put him in custody ^bso that the command of the LORD might be made clear to them. NASB

12a ויניחהו במשמר
MT 12b לפרש להם על־פי יהוה:

Translation: ^aAnd-they-caused-rest-him in-the-guardhouse ^bto-be-clear to-them according-to mouth-of the-LORD.

There is an understandable time delay between verses 11b and 12b, during which time the offender was incarcerated and the time to ascertain the LORD's will in the matter. How much time, we do not know. However, one can imagine the rage that enveloped the people as the news spread what had happened. To be sure, the parents were informed of the matter. The incident would have grieved them—even horrified them as to what would be the outcome. The confinement of the man was probably just

⁴⁷In Job 5:8 note the use of שים, “to put”, in the sense of “expound” a cause, “lay before” in law.

⁴⁸Dan (דן) was the first son born to Bilah, Rachel's handmaiden (Gen. 30:4-6; cf. Gen. 49:16). The sentiment expressed by Rachel at the naming of Dan was “God has vindicated me” (דנני אלהים). The name itself could be a perfect tense (“he judged, vindicated”) or a participle (“judge”) and thus very closely related to the explanation. This name also appears together with a divine element in compound names like “Daniel” and “Abidan”.

⁴⁹Many examples may be supplied from the Hebrew Scriptures. One such example is found in Genesis 27:36 where the episode (Gen. 26:34—28:9) reaches its singular climax when Esau bitterly and correctly articulates the explanation of Jacob's name. The ambiguity around “Jacob” (יעקב) when he took hold of his brother's heel at birth has now disappeared (Gen. 25:26). Here is the definite proof that the “taking hold of the heel” is unequivocal and unfavorable, connoting deception. Within the immediate context, Isaac stated: “Your brother came deceitfully, and has taken away your blessing” (v. 35). Esau bitterly retorts: “Is he not rightly name Jacob (יעקב), for he has supplanted me (ויעקבני) these two times?” Esau has been supplanted (the verbal form of the Hebrew consonants which make up the name “Jacob”), and the first occurrence is explicitly told by Esau when “He took away my birthright” (cf. Gen. 25:27-34).

as much for his protection as it was to keep him at hand to prevent him from escaping his due punishment.

This is one of four recorded cases where Moses had to wait further divine revelation before adjudicating a case law (cf. Num. 9:6-14; 15:32-36; 27:1-11). As in Numbers 15:34, the term, “guardhouse” (משמר), depicts a place of detention.⁵⁰ In both cases, detention was necessary until the LORD provided instructions regarding the appropriate penalty. The NASB translates ויניחהו במשמר as “they put him into custody”. Literally, the clause translates, “they caused him to rest in the guardhouse”.⁵¹

The close association of Moses as the one who mediated the LORD’s instructions to the people is evident when we compare verse 11b with 12b:

11b so they brought him to Moses . . .	ויביאו אתו אל-משה 11b
12b . . . to specify for themselves according to the mouth of the LORD. ⁵²	לפרש להם על-פי יהוה 12b

Moses is best remembered as the “lawgiver” par excellence. The Torah depicts him as the recipient of the LORD’s laws, which in turn he passed on to the people (Ex. 24:4ff.). They readily recognized his special position before the LORD (Ex. 19:7-8; 24:12-18). To Moses’ initial protest of being the leader of the Hebrews, the LORD retorts in Exodus 4:11-12: “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say” (NASB). It is little wonder then, that they brought the man to Moses to ascertain the LORD’s will in the matter, conveyed by the clause, לפרש להם על-פי יהוה (“to specify to/for themselves according to the mouth of the LORD”). The verb, פרש, means “to declare distinctly, specify, adjudicate”.⁵³

END OF PART ONE

⁵⁰As Levine notes, “Penal incarceration as the actual punishment for a crime was seldom the norm in the ancient Near East. There were, however, debtors’ prisons and those where slaves were held, often on the estates of large landowners and kings. These guarded facilities served as living quarters from which escape was difficult” (*Leviticus*, p. 167).

⁵¹ויניחהו במשמר + idiomatically means “place into custody” (Holladay, p. 231). The verb נוח literally means “rest” (here in the Hiphil). This idiom does not necessarily describe a place (*i.e.*, a prison), but a situation (*i.e.*, detention). The English idea of “arresting” someone parallels this Hebrew concept. The one who is arrested is physically restrained from escaping, and being harmed by potential threats.

⁵²This is my translation from the Hebrew text.

⁵³The verb occurs four times in biblical Hebrew (Qal only here in Lev. 24:12). Fishbane renders it “to make a legal ruling” (*Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 100-102). It is used in the Pual in Neh. 8:8 to describe the reading and explanation of a letter in the Aramaic of Ezra 4:18 (see also Num. 15:34). The related noun, פרשה, is used to express “the exact amount” of silver (Esther 4:7) or to describe the “account” of Mordecai’s fame (10:2). The term, פרש, in later Hebrew and in Syriac meant, “separate”. This is the word from which the word “Pharisee” is derived.