The Name of the LORD: A Sacred Trust
Leviticus 24:10-23
לָא לְשׁוֹנָה אֶראה שְׁמוֹ יְהוָה אֵלוהִי (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. 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. 16 Moreover, 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?

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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 literally 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.

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The Tabernacle was an oblong structure with three compartments. These are, in ascending order of holiness: the Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. The structure is orientated longitudinally, on an east-west axis, with the most sacred zone in the west. An outer perimeter demarcates the sacred area. This is divided into two equal squares. The first two zones in one square and the Court constitutes the other square.
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.”

Expanding on Wenham’s work, the central idea that was excluded from his analysis in the chiastic 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)
   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.”

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

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

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
   “Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp,
   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,
   “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;
all the congregation shall certainly stone him.
The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”
   “If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.
   The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life
   “fracture for fracture,
   eye for eye,
   tooth for tooth;”
   “just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him
   Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good,
   but the one who kills a man shall be put to death.”
   “There shall be one standard for you;
it shall be for the stranger as well as the native,”
for I am the LORD your God”
Then Moses spoke to the sons of Israel,
   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 chiastic 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 chiastic 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; b and the Israelite woman’s son and a man of Israel struggled with each other in the camp. NASB

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; b and they violently struggled in the camp, the son of the Israelitish and the Israelite man.

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. 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 expressly 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.

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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 (ֶָ֫הוּ) 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

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7 The waw conjunction with the independent personal pronoun (ֶָ֫הוּ) 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.  

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 (אָנָתָא) 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. 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, הָנַן, 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, חָנָה, 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, Gershom 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, a table, a 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” (אשה ישראלית). 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” (ישראלית) 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, “Israelite” (ישראל), 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” (בנֵי/בֶן), cannot be disputed.

This purposeful plural/singular arrangement of “son/sons” (בֶּן/בָּנֵי) 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” (איש) occurs only in E (אִישׁ היִשְׂרָאֵל) and E’ (אִישׁ ישָׂרָאֵל), 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” (בן אשה ישראלית), stunningly occurs only in D and D’. In the chart below, “P” stands for the plural form of “sons” (בָּנֵי) and “S” stands for the singular (בֶּן).

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<tr>
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<th>P sons of Israel</th>
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<th>B ekhsharon</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>P sons of Israel</td>
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<td>סנים כנעני</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>P and to his sons</td>
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<td>סינים סהאר</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>23b</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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.

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” (תל"י), 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 (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 ע (to”; A/A’), מ (from”; B/B’; D/D’), and ו (unto”; C/X/C’) in relation to the noun, “son”, have been chiastically arranged:

A to the sons of Israel (2)
B from a son of twenty years (3)
C and unto a son of sixty years (3)
D from a son of five years (5)
X unto a son of twenty years (5)
D’ from a son of a month (6)
C’ and unto a son of five years (6)
B’ from a son of sixty years (7)
A’ to the sons of Israel (34)

The beginning (A) and conclusion (A’) of this chiasic structure is artfully enveloped by (א טלחא) (“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.

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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” (יְהוּדָי), modifying the noun, “man” (יָשָׁם; v. 10a),13 also functions as an important structural marker. It is racially antithetical to son of an Egyptian man (יוֹבֵל נָגָר) (“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 יְהוּדָי (“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, יִבְרָאִית בֵּית יָשָׁם (into the midst of the children of Israel), immediately following its verb, יָשָׁמ (and he went out), it would have dislocated the necessary placement of בֶן נַגָּר יָשָׁם (son of an Egyptian man) in E to balance יְהוּדָי יָשָׁם (an Israelite man) in E’. Furthermore, it would have also simultaneously disrupted the overall intricate chiastic center (X; יְהוּדָי בֵּית יָשָׁם, children of Israel) of Leviticus 24!

An in depth discussion concerning the chiastic center of Leviticus 24, יִבְרָאִית בֵּית יָשָׁם (“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 יְהוּדָי.
11 **The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed.**  
**So they brought him to Moses.**  
*(Now his mother’s name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.)* NASB

Translation: **And he pierced, the son of an Israelitish woman, the Name, and (so) he cursed.**  
**Then they brought him to Moses.**  
*Now 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, the verb **blasphemed**, is understood to be from the verb קָבָה ("to execrate, blaspheme"), and not from קָבָל ("to pierce, name, designate"). Taken in isolation, the verb קָבָה in v. 11a could be the Qal imperfect of either the double ‘Ayin root קָבָה or of the Pe Nun verb, קָבָל, for the consonants and the vowel pointing are identical. 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 קָבָה  
(“to curse, execute, blaspheme”) | Parsed as if from קָבָל  
(“to pierce, name, designate”) |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| **v. 11a** קָבָה | 3ms Qal waw consecutive imperfect  
This verb could be parsed from קָבָה or . . . | 3ms Qal waw consecutive imperfect  
This verb could be parsed from קָבָל or . . . |
| **v. 16a** קָבָה | PARSING IMPOSSIBLE  
The form would have been קָבָל (not attested in biblical Hebrew). | ms Qal active participle  
(cannot be read differently even in an unpointed text) |
| **v. 16c** קָבָל | PARSING IMPOSSIBLE  
The form would have been קָבָה (not attested in biblical Hebrew). | Qal infinitive construct +  
3ms suffix with בּ 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, Independence by form may either be ms Qal active participle from אֵד ("to fear"; cf. Gen. 22:12), or 3ms Qal waw consecutive imperfect from אֵד ("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, בָּקַע (v. 16a) and בָּקֵעַ (v. 16c), are derived from the same verbal root as בָּקַע (v. 11a). This is because the verbal forms, בָּקַע (v. 16a) and בָּקֵעַ (v. 16c), cannot be parsed as deriving from בָּקַא, but only from בָּקַע! Furthermore, since the verbal root בָּקַע (“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 בָּקַע must also be understood in verse 11a.

v. 11a  “The son of the Israelite woman perforated (בָּקַע) the Name”

v. 16a  “Moreover the one who perforates (בָּקַע) the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death”

v. 16c  “The alien as well as the native, when he perforates (בָּקֵעַ) the Name, shall be put to death.”

The LXX also understood and confirms that the same verbal root, בָּקַע, in all three instances by employing the verbs ἐπωνομάζω (call by a name; pronounce a name) 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, בָּקַע (v. 11a), בָּקַע (v. 16a), and בָּקֵעַ (v. 16b) are derived from בָּקַע and not from בָּקַא (Lisowsky, p. 953; Mandelkern, p. 765). It is enigmatic that Beall and Banks’ Hebrew parsing guide improperly parses בָּקַע as being from בָּקַע in Lev. 24:11a, and then switch to בָּקַע 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 בָּקַע 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@|ו| (2x Job 3:8; Prov 11:26) and w~יQ@|ו| (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@|ו| 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, בָּקַע 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.

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The Name of the LORD: A Sacred Trust (Leviticus 24:10-23)

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

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

Translations that improperly render בָּעָה in verse 11a as deriving from בָּעָה 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 בָּעָה in verse 11a as deriving from בָּעָה, and translate accordingly:

20 Ibid., pp. 1232-33.
21 The LXX confirms the Hebrew root as בָּעָה. 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 בָּעָה 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 διακόπτειν (“to cut through”, ibid., 398), as in Hab. 3:14.
22 The masculine noun, בָּעָה, is a jeweller’s technical term, denoting a hole or cavity, whereas the feminine noun, בָּעָה, 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 בָּעָה 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 בָּעָה 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 בָּעָה, resulting in the one who was guilt to be cut off from his people.
NEB  “... an Israelite of pure descent. He uttered the Holy Name”  
NJPS  “the son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name”

However, even these translations of בְּנֵי 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 בְּנֵי does not mean “to blaspheme” (and that the verb is not בָּנָה), several commentators posit that בְּנֵי functions as a circumlocution (or euphuistic) for מָרָה (“curse”). While this sounds appealing, it falls short of contextual reasons why בְּנֵי should not be translated as more naturally as “pierced/perforated”.  

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

**בְּנֵי** in the Qal: to bore, to pierce/perforate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs. 12:9(10)</td>
<td>... and bored a hole in its lid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:21</td>
<td>... it will go into his hand and pierce it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa. 36:6</td>
<td>... it will go into his hand and pierce it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haggai 1:6</td>
<td>... to a purse perforated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habakkuk 3:14</td>
<td>You pierced with his spears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job 40:24</td>
<td>... with barbs can anyone pierce [his] nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40:26(41:2)</td>
<td>... with a hook pierce his jaw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**בְּנֵי** in the Qal: to mark out, designate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 30:28</td>
<td>... designate your wages and to me I will pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev. 24:11</td>
<td>... and he pierced ... the name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:16</td>
<td>... and the one piercing the name of the LORD shall surely die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:16</td>
<td>... when his piercing [the] name shall die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa. 62:2</td>
<td>... which the LORD shall designate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos 6:1</td>
<td>... distinguished ones first of the nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**בְּנֵי** in the Niphal: to be designated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Num. 1:17</td>
<td>... who had been designated by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra 8:20</td>
<td>... all of them designated by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chr. 12:32</td>
<td>... designated by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:41</td>
<td>... who were designated by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chr. 28:15</td>
<td>... who were designated by name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the above exhaustive listing of בקע in the Hebrew Scriptures, it may be safely concluded that the verbal forms בקע in Leviticus 24:11 and בקע 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 בקע as “blaspheme”? Except for translation tradition or ignorance, there is no semantic and linguistic reason. It is enough said that the verb בקע, translated as “blaspheme”, does not accurately represent the meaning of the Hebrew verb.

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” [ביהל], occurs first in the clause, whereas, “and cursed” [מיהל], 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” (שם) is the object of “and he pierced/perforated” (ביהל; cf. v. 15). Furthermore, it should be noted that בקע is only one part of the verbal chain, for מיהל (“and he cursed”) in verse 11a (as a waw consecutive after בקע), most probably further defines בקע in some way.

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

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26 As the passage unfolds, Moses’ word choice of בקע 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.
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 בקן, and especially נא. Thus arises part of the ambiguity of verse 11. Only two instances in the Hebrew Scriptures does נא have נא (אלהים/“gods”/“judges”) as its object: Leviticus 24:15 and Exodus 22:27(28), and never the tetragrammaton (יהוה, “LORD”). The verbal parallelism, A/A’: בקן, נא, בקן, and נא, נא is not by accident. It suggests these verbs function coordinately, though not as an hendiadys, for the central element, and the explicit term for “curse” (כֵּרָה), has no counterpart.

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.

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

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27 Hartley notes that “1 Sam. 3:13 is considered by most textual critics to be a third reference. The MT reads אלהים, ‘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 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” (כֵּרָה), is strikingly found at the fulcrum of this literary structure!

31 The second verb in verse 11a, כָּרָה (יְהוָה, 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 כָּרָה stands without parallel to בקן (see the seven-fold literary analysis of these two verbs on page 20).

32 A through lexical study of כָּרָה 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 לָכַּע (llq) 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” (לָכַע) Abram in Genesis 12:3, which in turn the LORD will curse (רַרָה 33)

12a And-I-shall-bless ones-blessing-you אֲשֶׁר-לְךָ מְבֹרָךְ
12b but-one-cursing-you I-shall-curse וְטַלְּעֵל אֵלֶיךָ 12b
12c and-they-will-be-blessed in-you all-of וְנַעֲבֹר בּוֹ וְתֹּֽאכִיל הָאָדָם 12c peoples-of-the-earth.

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 (יהוה יד ויהי) 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) מֶלַע (llq) is used without an object. “The reluctance of the ancient Israelite authors to use a name of God with מֶלַע is very evident”.35 It is clear that the Name36 is a substitute and equivalent to “the LORD”

33 The distinction between the verbs לָכַע and רַר (rr) in Genesis 12:3 is that, “the one who curses (לָכַע) you [pronounces a formula], I will curse (רַר) 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).
36 The KJV adds “of the Lord” in italicize to indicate what is implied, but not expressed in the Hebrew.

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(יהוה) because of the presence of the definite article\textsuperscript{37} and the entire context of the passage (see v. 16).\textsuperscript{38} In addition, in Deuteronomy 28:58b, the direct object particle יָּ֫עָּבֶד 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 (\textit{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.”\textsuperscript{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 (\textit{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.\textsuperscript{40}

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

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

\textsuperscript{39} A. Nordtzij, \textit{Leviticus}, p. 245.

Because of what the man did, cursing the Name, they brought him to Moses (הָעָנִי, וַיָּבֹא וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו, v. 11b). 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 (םִּבְרָא, “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 (סונֹן אִישֶּל אִיתֵּרִית, vv. 10a, 11a; סונֹן הָאָרֶץ, v. 10b), or with his Egyptian father (בָּאָרֶץ, סון אֵילֵית, v. 10a). Uniquely, he is at this time somberly alone, indicated by the separate direct object pronoun, him (םֶּלֶךְ הָאָרֶץ). Literally, 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” (דִּבְרָא טַבּ, “they brought” and “him” into one Hebrew word. However, he chose rather to separate them: they brought—him.

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).

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:

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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, וַיָּבֹא וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו, “He cursed so they brought”. The translation of the waw as “so they brought” (כִּי עָנִי אָבָא) 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, ובָּאָרֶץ, 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. מַעֲמָר 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 (עברית שלמית בת דברי בני Дан), 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 (וַֽעֲרָבָּה) 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).

The name of his mother was Shelomith (שְּלומְת), and her father’s, Dibri (דִּבְרִ). 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 (שְּלומְת) suggests “retribution” (הַמִּדְחָה; Ps. 91:8), or “restitution” (הַשִּׁמְשְׁת) as found later in Leviticus 24:18, 21. Dibri (דִּבְרִ) may suggest “(legal) case” (הַרְבּוֹת; Job 5:8). Furthermore, by his mother, he belonged to the tribe of Dan (דָּן), which suggests “judgment” or “vindication” (נְדָע). 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. In this case, these names “coincidently” 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 *They put him in custody*  
*b so that the command of the LORD might be made clear to them.* NASB

Translation: *And-they-caused-rest-him in-the-guardhouse to-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

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47 In Job 5:8 note the use of יֵצֶר, “to put”, in the sense of “expound” a cause, “lay before” in law.
48 Dan (דר) 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” (גַּם הִנֵּה, יָנָּד). 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”.
49 Many 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” (יהִיָּכָב) 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 (יהִיָּכָב), for he has supplanted me (יֵצֶר) 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” (מַסְסָרוֹן), depicts a place of detention.\(^{50}\) In both cases, detention was necessary until the LORD provided instructions regarding the appropriate penalty. The NASB translates נָשַׁב מְצָרַע 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 . . .

12b  . . . to specify for themselves according to the mouth of the LORD.\(^{52}\)

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, לָאָפֵשׁ לְפָאֵשׁ עִלְיוֹן יְהוָה (“to specify to/for themselves according to the mouth of the LORD”). The verb, לָאָפֵשׁ, means “to declare distinctly, specify, adjudicate”.\(^{53}\)

END OF PART ONE

\(^{50}\)As 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 quarter from which escape was difficult” (Leviticus, p. 167).

\(^{51}\)This idiomatically means “place into custody” (Holladay, p. 231). The verb יָשָׁב 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 parallel this Hebrew concept. The one who is arrested is physically restrained from escaping, and being harmed by potential threats.

\(^{52}\)This is my translation from the Hebrew text.

\(^{53}\)The 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, הָעְרֵב, 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, הָעָרֶב, in later Hebrew and in Syriac meant, “separate”. This is the word from which the word “Pharisee” is derived.