

SESSION THIRTEEN

WORSHIPPING THROUGH SACRIFICE

Leviticus 1:1–10:20

I. THE SETTING

The book of Leviticus is very closely connected with Exodus and the tabernacle. In actuality, the regulations of Leviticus are an extension of the Mosaic Law covenant given at Sinai. The book concludes with the remark, "*These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai*" (27:34). Thus, Leviticus was given while the Israelites were still at Sinai. The tabernacle was erected on the first day of the first month of the second year, i.e., approximately one year after leaving Egypt. The book of Numbers begins with the first day of the second month of the second year (Num 1:1). Since Leviticus was given from the tabernacle (Lev 1:1), the book was given during the first month of the second year immediately after the tabernacle was erected.

II. THE PURPOSE

As Exodus closed with the appearance of the glory of the LORD in the tabernacle, Leviticus explains how a people are to relate to a God who dwells in their midst. Consequently, "holiness" is the predominant motif. Now that the tabernacle had been constructed, Leviticus narrated the way in which the priests were to care for the sanctuary and throne room of the Great King.

The stress on holiness reflects a concern that YHWH continue to dwell in their midst. R. K. Harrison sums up this thought:

The reason the newly consecrated Israelite priests were given such detailed instructions about the care of God's sanctuary was to ensure His continuing presence with His people. In the covenant relationship God approached Israel and made specific promises to them, contingent upon their obedience to the terms of the Sinai agreement. One of these was the demand that the Israelites should live in a way that would show the contemporary Near Eastern nations the true nature of holiness Only as the chosen people maintained ceremonial and moral holiness could they expect God to honour them with His presence and bring into effect the blessings promised in the covenant.¹

As a summing up of the purpose of Leviticus, Allen Ross states:

On the basis of this we have concluded that the book is the hand book for the priests as they lead the corporate and individual worship of Israel at the sanctuary; it is the instruction of the holy Yahweh to make his covenantal people holy so that He might dwell in peace with them and bless them.²

¹R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Commentaries, 26.

²Allen P. Ross, "An Outline of The Theology of Leviticus" (unpublished class notes in Old Testament 117, Dallas Seminary, Fall 1981), 3.

III. STRESS ON HOLINESS

The theme of the book is "holiness to YHWH." The actual meaning of holiness is to be "separate, set apart" to something. In this case, it is being set apart to YHWH. Leviticus presents a picture of mankind as sinful, corrupted, susceptible to disease, and in constant need of spiritual renewal. Since Israel is called to serve a God who is holy, they must reflect this attribute of their king with whom they stand in covenant relation. God is holy, i.e., He is set apart by His attributes. This would include His power, His majesty, His greatness, His leadership, and His righteousness. All of these attributes set YHWH apart. His righteousness sets Him apart from the rest of creation profaned by sin; His power sets Him apart from all pagan gods—he is alive and active.

To conclude that by self-reliance the whole nation could keep the covenant code would be a gross underestimation of themselves. For many, this was a mistake in thinking, and only perpetuated a lack of trust. Yet God was acutely aware of their failings and even made provision for it. Through the priesthood and sacrificial system, God displayed His graciousness and compassion by making a way of acceptance available so that they could fellowship with Him (the sacrifices alone provided no benefits if not accompanied by faith). Leviticus, as well as the initial commandments of the Law in Exodus, is not dealing with the basis of salvation, i.e., salvation does not come by keeping the Law. Rather, Leviticus deals with the way a nation needs to live and function with God dwelling in their midst. As Israel fails, God will discipline and even withdraw the presence of His glory from them.

IV. THE STRUCTURE OF LEVITICUS

The book falls into two basic parts: chapters 1–10 deal with how Israel is to worship a holy God (through sacrifices and the mediation of the priesthood; chapters 11–27 deal with how Israel is to walk with her holy God (through purification and holiness). See *Suppl. 13.1* for a more detailed presentation of the structure of the book.

V. THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was very complex, and included both scheduled sacrifices and unscheduled sacrifices. Unscheduled sacrifices included the peace offering, sin offering, etc. Some sacrifices were offered in regard to sin (sin offering, and guilt offering). Others were an expression of thanksgiving, gratitude, or for one's love for YHWH. Some sacrifices were offered to deal with ceremonial uncleanness (e.g., the sacrifices required of the woman following childbirth in Lev 12). Furthermore, the sacrifices could be on an individual basis or on a national basis (e.g., the Day of Atonement). As one can easily determine, the sacrificial system required thousands of animals and continual activity for the priests who had to perform the necessary procedures. Nevertheless, sacrifice was the essence of worship in the Old Testament, and was designed to be done in conjunction with faith. The motives behind a sacrifice could include any of the following concepts:

- 1) A Gift. Sacrifice involved a surrender of what one was and what one had. As the worshipper lost something (the sacrifice had to be totally consumed either by the priest or upon the altar), something was gained (the satisfaction of worship and recognition that everything belonged to God).

- 2) Communion. Sacrifice could express that longing in man for union with God and fellowship.
- 3) Expiation. Since blood was such a predominant aspect of the sacrificial system, the worshipper was constantly mindful of his sinful condition and need for expiation. His sin and guilt could only be dealt with by a blood sacrifice. This called attention to the seriousness of sin and man's need for a substitute to bear his punishment. This is not to say that the blood of the animals had any merit in itself.

VI. THE LAWS OF THE SACRIFICES (LEV 1–7)

There are two basic categories of sacrifices considered in Lev 1–7: the sweet savor offerings and the non-sweet savor offerings.

1. Sweet Savor Offerings - These are sacrifices made in communion with God.
 - a. Sacrifices of Devotion

The sacrifices of whole burnt offerings and meal offerings were made in communion as gifts of devotion and consecration. These could include gifts presented, tributes, and offerings of worship. They could be offered on several occasions:

 - 1) Regular tithes - as part of the giving of tithes and firstfruits.
 - 2) Dedicatory gifts (Lev 27)
 - 3) Tokens of gratitude - this would include freewill offerings made anytime the worshipper felt compelled or praise sacrifices for some benefit received.
 - 4) Petitionary - to obtain favor or to appease God.
 - b. Sacrifices of Communion

The sacrifice of a peace offering could be given to express that all was well with God.
2. Non-sweet Savor Offerings - These are sacrifices made for communion with God. They were of two basic types: the sin offering and the guilt offering. These were sacrifices of expiation for sins against God or man which had prompted a feeling of guilt and an expectancy of punishment. These offerings were given for the purpose of making *atonement*, i.e., to expiate or appease God's wrath, and of bringing forgiveness to the confessor.³

³ For a helpful discussion of the etymology and proper meaning of the word "atone," see Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 52. Rooker favors the idea that the meaning may vary (depending on the context) between the notion of "wipe, purge" and "ransom." [The older theory was that the term basically meant "to cover" based on an Arabic cognate]. Rooker (52-53) notes, "When an object such as the altar at the tabernacle is the object of the verb, *kpr* has the meaning of "to cleanse" or "wipe," thereby cleansing this holy object of the contaminants that have resulted from human sin. When, on the other hand, a person is the beneficiary of the offering, *kpr* seems to carry the idea of making a ransom, of a life given in place of another. Through the animal's death and the carrying out of the appropriate ritual, the sinner is ransomed from the death that his sins merit."

- a. Sin Offering - for a sin uncovered and not premeditated.
- b. Guilt Offering - for a fault or trespass in which compensation was required.

A. **The Burnt Offering (Lev 1:1-17)**

The burnt offering was the essential offering of the temple, being used on many different occasions, both by the individual as well as the nation as a whole. Yet at all times, it was a public worship act . . . a worship offering made in communion. The crucial aspect of this sacrifice is that it was totally consumed on the altar, thereby signifying a complete surrender to God (through substitution), as well as complete acceptance by God. The whole offering was burnt, signifying the complete exhaustion of the wrath of God (as does the death of Christ). Although the offering was not made to "obtain acceptance," it served as public testimony for a believing Israelite in his worship that no one approaches God at any time without a substitutionary atonement that provides acceptance before God. With this in mind, the sacrifice was a public witness to the fact that God could be approached. The fact that several categories of animals could be used is instructive that no one is barred from acceptance with God or from worship on the basis of their income or ability to give. This offering teaches us that the faithful Israelite (and Christians today!) should constantly bear witness that his acceptance before God rested on substitutionary atonement.

B. **The Meal Offering (Lev 2:1-16)**

The meal offering was a very logical sequence to the burnt offering. Whereas the burnt offering bore testimony of acceptance with God based on substitutionary atonement, the meal offering was a recognition that everything the worshipper was and had belonged to God. Most often a meal offering would accompany the burnt offering. The faithful Israelite would be saying in effect, "If God is gracious to provide a substitute for my atonement, then I want to recognize that all I am and have now belongs to Him." Thus the meal offering was a dedication. The offeror would bring to the priest a "best portion" of his foodstuff which represented the provision God had given him. The priest would take a handful and burn it on the altar, with the remainder eaten by the priests. For the worshipping Israelite, there was nothing left . . . a recognition that he had truly given it to God. This offering is instructive to the believer today. As a response to God's mercies, the Christian is to present Himself as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). The moment we are pardoned, all we have and all we are become Christ's!

C. **The Peace Offering (Lev 3:1-17)**

The peace offering (or fellowship offering) was a very joyous occasion in which the offeror (through a shared meal) celebrated with his friends and the congregation the fact that he was at peace with God, that all was well. The peace offering could be in response to a *particular* blessing received from God (cf. 7:12-15) or simply as a general expression of gratitude to God. It could also be given in response to a vow that was followed by God's answer to prayer (or cry for deliverance), as in Jonah 2:9. The uniqueness of this sacrifice was that the animal brought as an offering was allowed to be eaten by the worshiper and his friends (excepting the fat and certain portions for the priest). In effect, it was a sacrifice in which God gave back to man of the benefits of the sacrifice. In this light, it was a logical sequence to the burnt and meal offerings. Once I give all to God, I find that he responds in overabounding grace and bestows blessing and benefits to me. The person who has been redeemed and who has given his life to the Lord, will spontaneously engage in acts of praise and fellowship with the saints. Ross states,

Gratitude does not horde up the benefits for selfish consumptions. The one who recognizes all the blessings of God in his life will give freely to God so that others may benefit.⁴

D. Sin Offering (Lev 4:1–5:13)

The sin offering and the trespass (or guilt) offering were distinct from the first three. The sin and trespass offerings were non-sweet savor offerings, to be offered for communion (not when one was in communion). These offerings provided for the forgiveness of sins so that the individual (or community) could devoutly worship in the sanctuary. However, both the sin and trespass offerings did not atone for every sin. They were restricted to certain types of sin.

1. Types of Sin Covered

The sin offering was to cover the sin of the individual or community which was done unwittingly (בְּשִׁגְגָה). Ross clarifies what is involved:

לֹא יָדַע clarifies that the sin is not premeditated or intentional—he did not know that he had sinned, but found out afterward. Lev. 4:13 says that the sin is hidden from his eyes. Josh. 20:3 says it is done without knowledge, or without conscious intent. In the context, these sins are sins of ignorance (Lev. 4), sins of carelessness (5:4), or sin without defiance (Numbers 15:30).⁵

Some sins covered by the sin offering would be cases of ritual defilement and the violation of rights, such as property rights of men.

2. Types of Sin Not Covered

Many sins were not covered by this offering, particularly those sins done in defiance of God's law. Num 15:30 considers these to be sins of a "high hand," i.e., not only is the sin done out in the open but it is arrogant and defiant—almost a fist shaking rebelliously against the LORD. The sin offering did not cover those premeditated, arrogantly, and defiantly committed sins (cf. Prov 6:17; 30:13). Also, violations of the ten commandments were not covered, e.g., worship of other gods, adultery, and rape. Willful disregard of cultic rules was not covered, such as failure to observe the Passover (Num 9:13) or the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:29-30).

3. Implications for Forgiveness

Obviously the Law did not provide a sacrifice for many sins. There was no provision in the Law for David's willful sin with Bathsheba. He stood condemned under the Law, and the only hope for him was to flee to God Himself (there was no sacrifice he could offer). In such cases, forgiveness could be granted only by a free act of grace. This might follow (1) the intercession of the priest (Ex 32:11,13,20-25); (2) true repentance and contrition (Ps 51:17); or (3) direct, divine intervention (Isa 6:5-7). If such real repentance was expressed, the sinner had hope in the mercy seat blood offered on the Day of Atonement for the nation. If the sin was left unconfessed before God, the Law only held out a fearful expectation of judgment.

⁴Allen P. Ross, "Leviticus," (unpublished class notes in Old Testament 117, Dallas Seminary, Fall 1981), 30.

⁵ Ibid., 33.

4. Significance

The sin offering was designed for the forgiveness of sin, cleansing for defilement and pollution, and the restoration to communion with God. This was only possible in the case of real repentance (note Lev 5:5 and the instruction to "confess"). The sin offering made atonement for the person of the offender, whereas the trespass offering only atoned for the special offense. The sin offering focused on reestablishing communion with God, as 1 John 1:9 does for the Christian.

E. The Trespass Offering (Lev 5:14–6:7)

1. The Nature of the Sin

The trespass (or guilt) offering is actually an extension of the sin offering. Both involve sins which are done "unwittingly" (Lev 5:15). The essential difference is that the trespass offering involves a *reparation*. This is due to the fact that these violations seem all to involve loss of property by fraud. There is a point to be stressed in this type: sin often involves the defrauding of God or of men; when sin is confessed, the wrong must be made right. In such a situation, a man voluntarily confessed himself as "guilty." The cases listed (Lev 5:15; 6:2; 14:12; 19:20 and Num 6:12) represented a wrong for which a special ransom was to be given. At times, this could even be against YHWH: the leper and the violating Nazirite were both required to bring a trespass offering, the one as a trespass against the community, the other against YHWH.

2. The Occasion

This offering was made whenever someone was deprived or defrauded of their rights. One could deprive YHWH, e.g., with the unlawful eating of the holy things (5:4-19; 22:14). One could deprive another person, e.g., by the failure to report finding lost property (6:3). The responsibility of the guilty party was to (1) confess his sin publicly; (2) make full restitution of what was defrauded; and (3) pay a fine.

3. The Significance

The basic significance of this offering is to point out that there are times when one must go beyond confession and forgiveness so as to make reparation wherever possible, i.e., to restore what was defrauded. One cannot honestly enter into worship and service without making things right. To do so is the outward evidence of genuine faith and true repentance (note Zaccheus). The trespass offering also looks to Christ, for it is He who gave His life a ransom for many . . . the fullest satisfaction that could be made to God.

F. Further Instructions for the Priests About Sacrifices (Lev 6:8–7:38)

The material in this section concerns mostly the same sacrifices, though the order is slightly different [peace offerings are treated last]. The primary difference of this section in comparison with the preceding material is that it deals predominantly with the concerns of the priests. Also, the content of 6:8–7:38 is largely concerned with the portion of the sacrifices that were to go to the officiating priests.