

LEVITICUS

Lesson 3 - Chapter 1

We spent the first 2 weeks of our Leviticus study simply preparing the background and laying the groundwork to make Leviticus more understandable, enjoyable, and hopefully, meaningful. I would like to reiterate from an earlier lesson a few principles that we need to keep in mind in our study:

1. God divides, elects, and separates. That is, Yehoveh draws very strict boundaries and makes hard and fast distinctions among people, nations, and worship practices. He is intolerant of evil and sin, and He reserves unto Himself the EXCLUSIVE right to pronounce which is which. He excludes those who are not “His People”; at the time of Leviticus, His people are ONLY the people of Israel
2. Leviticus offers us the priestly worldview. It is written through the eyes of God’s newly ordered group of priests, who come exclusively from the tribe of Levi.
3. God classifies sin in two basic categories: intentional and unintentional. This is quite different from the typical way we humans want to think of sin.....which is more along the lines of big or little, trivial or terrible, inconsequential or Salvation threatening.
4. The sacrificial system we are about to study does NOT deal with intentional sins and therefore does not provide a means of reconciliation with God for deliberate sin. It deals ONLY with unintentional sins. Nothing we will read about in Leviticus will reconcile the offender with God if that offender’s sin is considered “high handed” or “great”....which is Bible-speak for “intentional”.
5. The sacrificial system is about MORE than atoning for sin. We’ll see that several of the God-ordained sacrifices have little relationship to sin.
6. While Yeshua fulfilled the Sacrificial System, He also fulfilled much MORE than the rather limited abilities of the Sacrificial System to atone for a certain category of sins.
7. The foundational principle behind the Sacrificial System is **substitution**. That is, the deaths of animals were going to take the place of, **substitute for**, what rightly should have been the deaths of the humans who were guilty of sinning against Yehoveh.
8. Leviticus is the middle book of the book series of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. We need to read Leviticus as though it’s just a continuation of Exodus, which then eventually rolls right on into Numbers.

READ LEV 1:1 – end

The first words of Leviticus, “Now He called (to Moses)”, are in Hebrew **vayikra**..... and **vayikra** is the name the Hebrews give to this book that gentiles call by its Greek name, Leviticus.

Though these first few words, **Now He called**, sound kind of quaint to us, they carry a weighty meaning that is important to grasp: Yehoveh is about to make some very formal, very important, pronouncements. Just as when our President might occasionally make a speech from his desk in the Oval Office, we understand that what is about to come carries much more importance and significant than regular news conferences or interviews....when it happens from the Oval Office, it is a special event. The protocol here at the opening of Leviticus is much like it was back in Exodus when Yehoveh called to Moses from the summit of Mt. Sinai in order to give Moses the Law; but this time Yehoveh calls to Moses to give him the all-important Sacrificial System that would appease God's wrath at men, when they offend God.

Allow me to repeat something I said to you at our last meeting: the Sacrificial System and The Law are the 2 primary components that, together, make up God's justice system....in Hebrew, **mishpat**. And that while in everyday common conversation a Hebrew would usually call every element of God's justice system The Law, with the Sacrificial System just seen as part of the Law, the way the Sacrificial System and The Law function make them somewhat separate. The Law and the Sacrificial System EACH have different functions and very different purposes. The Law leads to punishment while the Sacrificial System leads to atonement, forgiveness coupled with reconciliation.

The term, The Law, has become very general; so much so that it is widely misused and misunderstood, even among Jews. It is especially misused and wildly (and I think to a degree willfully) misused within the Christian church. Let me explain: even though we don't see Yehoveh pronounce what can accurately be called The Law until about halfway through the Book of Exodus, Jews will commonly use the term "The Law" as a synonym for the ENTIRE Torah. That is, they'll just call the ENTIRE first 5 books of the Bible, The Law, even though the Law isn't even given until Exodus. In addition we must remember that the Jewish people also have other "Law", taken from non-Biblical sources such as the Talmud, that they call Law. So the Jews tend to call any and every religious instruction whether from Scripture or from rulings of their religious leaders, and even general commentary from their greatest Rabbis, The Law. The Law can be a very confusing term. The best analogy I can think of is that in the Church we have a lot of people walking around with ONLY the New Testament in their hands; sometimes a brand new Christian will only have a book of the 4 Gospels. If we asked them what they were holding, they'll usually answer, "The Bible". Now that really isn't accurate, is it, since what they have is but a PORTION of the Bible; but we know what they mean. We'll also commonly hear a Pastor or Minister preach and say that he's teaching the Bible. When more often than not what he's actually teaching is a doctrine....a denominationally based church tradition that is said to represent a Biblical principle. In both of these cases we gentile Believers who speak Christian-eze completely understand what they're saying....even though technically it isn't accurate. This analogy is the same as it is with the Jews when they use the term, The Law.....it could mean any number of things and we have to discern from the context what any particular usage of that term is referring to at that moment.

Notice here in Leviticus how God makes a formal separation between The Law and the Sacrificial System. Remember the importance of that little phrase, "Now He (meaning God) Called".....it denotes a cardinal event is about to happen, something of great magnitude. We received essentially the same preamble from God as He instructed Moses to come up to Mt.

Sinai to receive the Law. Now, in a separate event, Yehoveh AGAIN pronounces this important preamble.....Now He called.....and this time God will give Moses the Sacrificial System. So, first, back in Exodus, God gives Moses the definition of sin, which is contained in the Law, and the consequences for sinning by breaking any of the ordinances of that Law code. Further, by the giving of the Law the Lord has set out the moral choices for Israel; moral choices that the wills of each Israelite will decide to obey or disobey. Now, in Leviticus, God is giving Moses the other part of His justice system... the part that provides for ATONEMENT when someone sins, and breaks the Law code. Of course, as we now know, this atonement is only available for a certain class of sin.....the unintentional sin. BTW: I'm going to remind you of this over and over again, because it is primarily THIS attribute of the Sacrificial System providing atonement ONLY for sins that were not deliberate that causes Paul to characterize Christ's sacrifice as superior and the Sacrificial System portion of the Law as inferior when the two are compared.

Verse 2 makes very clear one of the principles I enumerated for you just a few minutes ago: Yehoveh is speaking to *benei Yisra'el*. He is speaking to Israel, who is His people.....no one else, at this time, is His people. Now the OT is positively loaded with this Hebrew term, *benei Yisra'el*, which literally means **the young of Israel**. However, it is usually rendered "the children of Israel" in our Bibles. The MEANING however, is best expressed in modern Western thinking as "the Israelite people". This expression is not meant to mean ONLY the young, nor is it meant to be children; nor is it meant to refer to ONLY those with Jacob's blood in their veins, those that were genealogical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.... for 1000's upon 1000's of foreigners (*ger*) already had, and would continue to join Israel. *Benei Israel* is a national term..... it refers to the group as a whole.....in this case, it's a lot like saying "the American people".

With the stage set.....that is, we know who is speaking (Yehoveh), where this is taking place (at the Wilderness Tabernacle), and that God is addressing Himself to Moses and the nation of Israel... we are now given instruction on the first type of offering, or sacrifice. It is the burnt offering. In vs.2 when we're told "if anyone brings an offering for Yehoveh".....the word used for offering is ***korban***. This is a good word to memorize because it is a common Hebrew word that means any offering....any kind of offering. It's like at Church where the term **offering** could mean anything from money, to property, to personal time. And the offering could be for the general fund or it could be for something specific. It could mean our regular tithe, or something above the tithe, or just irregular giving if one doesn't tithe or perhaps it's just a token donation while visiting a Synagogue or Church.

So, the ***korban*** is NOT the specific name for this particular class of sacrifice called a burnt offering. Each class of offering, each type of ***korban*** we encounter will have a specific Hebrew name. In the case of the burnt offering, it is ***'olah***. ***'Olah*** is the original Hebrew word that we almost universally translate as "burnt offering". I'd like to get a little technical for just a moment. The term "Burnt offering" is what scholars call a "functional definition" or a "functional translation" of the Hebrew word ***'olah***. We're going to encounter a lot of these functional translations in the Torah. What that means is that it is NOT a literal translation of the Hebrew term because the literal translation wouldn't mean anything to us. In fact sometimes the literal translation is not even known or agreed upon by Bible scholars and translators. Literally ***'olah*** is thought to mean either "ascend", "go up", or "bring-near". So most

literally '**olah** would translate as "a near-offering", or "an ascend offering". That's so peculiar to our culture that the translators thought that it really serves no purpose to translate it that way. So instead of giving a literal translation of the word '**olah** it was determined that it would be better to give the reader the FUNCTION or purpose of the "near offering"; and that function is as an offering to the Lord that is burned up with fire on the altar.....a burnt offering. So "burnt offering" is how '**olah** is typically translated....and its not wrong....it just doesn't include the sense that by burning up the offering, it emits smoke, which **brings it near** to God by **ascending** up to Him in Heaven. I'm not necessarily going to break down the names of every sacrifice, to the tiniest detail, like I just did with the '**olah**....the burnt offering. I simply wanted you to understand what a functional translation is and that many times in the Bible we'll get functional, rather than literal, translations of words. And there's nothing wrong about it. However sometimes we can get a lot more understanding if we'll ALSO examine the original Hebrew word and go ahead and translate it literally because it exposes the Hebrew mindset and the Middle Eastern culture of that era. It helps us to get a better idea of what those people's mental picture was when they were doing these things. And in the case of the '**olah**, the "near-offering" that we commonly refer to as the burnt offering, by looking at the words literally we see that it is the **smoke**, and where that smoke is going, that is the key element of the effectiveness of that offering. I'll show you why the smoke is so key in just a moment.

The type of burnt offering that we see here in Chapter one is what I would best term a "personal" offering. That is this offering (and the next several offerings we'll study) is made by individuals, private persons, on behalf of that person. This is as opposed to later on in Leviticus we'll see special offerings, sacrifices, including burnt offerings that are made on behalf of the NATION of Israel....national offerings. This sets up an important principle that is used throughout the Bible in that God deals with Israel, and us, on BOTH an individual level and on a corporate, or group, level. That corporate level could be the Church, that is, all Believers.....or it could be as a nation...a literal nation as we think of it today. When we read end-times prophecies we'll read of God making a distinction among individuals; for instance He'll put a mark on the foreheads of certain people, chosen person by person, for the purpose of keeping them safe AND for the purpose of identifying those who will be saved as opposed to the unmarked who will be damned. But we also see God deal with entire nations; for instance we're told that nations that come against Israel will be destroyed.

So the burnt offering of Leviticus 1 is a personal, individual offering of sacrifice.....and it is also, technically, considered a food offering. Meat was a luxury item in the time of Moses and still was in Yeshua's day. So while the entire animal used for a burnt offering was killed and thrown onto the Altar to be completely burned up, that was NOT the case with other types of animal sacrifices. Rather there was a procedure in which only certain parts of the sacrificial animal were put onto the Brazen Altar to be consumed by fire, the remainder was used for food.....depending on the situation it would be eaten by the priests, or by the person who brought the sacrifice, or in some instances by both. In fact it was only the more well to do of Hebrews who ate meat that was not used FIRST as a sacrifice because it was expensive. Let me say that again: for the average Israelite, all the meat they ate was the leftover portion of a sacrifice even though the Law gave them permission to eat meat that was not part of a sacrifice.

In the burnt offering the ENTIRE animal (except for the skin, which was given to the priests) was consumed by the fire of the Altar. Imagine how a people who had very little meat felt each time they took a sheep or goat to the Altar, and watched it go up in flames. This was an expensive offering and it indeed represented a personal sacrifice for the typical Israelite family to give up such a valuable animal. These families deprived themselves in order give to Yehoveh what He instructed them to give. Now the burnt offering could use a whole range of domesticated animals for sacrificing that ranged from Bulls, to sheep, on down to Pigeons. The reason for this was a practical one: poorer people simply did not have the money or the means to sacrifice a Ram or a Bull. Last week I pointed out that the size of the sacrificial animal, or it's inherent value.....a Bull usually being the largest and most valuable and a turtledove being the least.....had nothing to do with the measure of seriousness of a sin being atoned for, or in pleasing God more or less. Notice as well that I said "domesticated" animals were specifically called for as sacrificial animals.....animals that were typically grown for food purposes were the kind to be used for sacrificing no the Altar. NO WILD ANIMALS were allowed for sacrificial purposes.....you couldn't kill a deer or a mountain goat and use it for a sacrifice.

The **'olah** was the most common type of sacrificial offering, offered in the mornings and the evenings every day.....and offered more frequently during the day on special Holy days. As a general rule the sacrificial animal had to be at least one-year old, a male, and unblemished. That is, it couldn't be sickly, lame, deformed, injured..... not even cosmetically abnormal, perhaps with a twisted horn, or could it be of an unusual color. It had to be your BEST animal, as near perfection as was reasonably possible.

Now, here's how the ritual worked: first the worshipper brought the animal to the Tabernacle to be inspected by the priests to be sure the animal conforms to the requirements of being without defect and of the proper kind and age. Each worshipper would bring their animal through the large gate at the east end of the outer courtyard that surrounded the Tent of Meeting. They would stand in the northeast corner of the courtyard waiting their turn.

Next when a priest becomes available, as we're told in vs. 4, the worshipper lays his hands on the head of the animal. Now this "laying on of hands" is something we could probably spend an entire lesson learning about. But, generally, the idea was this: By the worshipper laying his hands onto the animal BEFORE it was killed it was an official acknowledgment that **this** particular animal was being assigned as the sacrifice on behalf of the individual who was laying his hands on the animal; and at that moment the life of the animal was being turned over to God. The Hebrew word for this "laying on of hands" is **semikhah** and it is used most often in the Bible to refer to a person in authority assigning someone, or something, a task. Or it's about the transference of authority. For instance when Moses handed the task of leading Israel over to Joshua, he laid hands on him thus acknowledging the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua. The same idea applies here with the sacrifice.....the owner of the animal, by laying his hands on the animal, signifies that this animal has been designated for the purpose of being a sacrifice specifically on behalf of it's owner. But that's not all that is signified.

There also seems to be some element of transferring the guilt of the animal's owner onto the animal in this laying on of hands, **semikhah**; and therefore by transferring the guilt to the animal, the killing of the animal substitutes for the death of the worshipper. However that

meaning ONLY applied to certain types of sacrifices.....meal (grain) offerings and thank-offerings, for instance, had nothing to do with sin so it would not have been appropriate. While the laying on of hands in certain sacrifices indicates both a transference and a substitution..... that is the guilt or sin of the worshipper is transferred to the animal, and then the animal becomes the substitute for the worshipper.....it was primarily the fascinating ritual offering of the Scapegoat where the transference-of-sin concept was best displayed. In the Scapegoat ritual it was from all Israel to the Scapegoat that the sins of the entire nation were transferred (we'll eventually study that more closely).

We have record of other cultures of that day, and even earlier, performing similar acts for similar reasons. For instance in the Hittite cultural a woman hoping to become pregnant would touch the horn of a fertile cow in hopes of transferring the fertility of the cow to herself.

Though we're not told so, it is very likely that some type of prayer was said or a psalm was sung as hands were laid on the animal...probably both by the worshipper and the priest. There are many Biblical Psalms and other songs from Hebrew tradition that mention burnt offerings, and likely it was one or more of these that were used. Psalms 40, 51, and 66 were almost certainly *eventually* used during this portion of the sacrificial procedure. I say eventually because first, the Psalms weren't even written for about 300 years after the Wilderness Tabernacle was built; and second, because as I mentioned in my introduction to Leviticus, we know that the sacrificial procedures changed and evolved over the centuries.

After the laying hands on the animal it was killed. It was the worshipper, NOT the priest, who killed the animal and this was accomplished on the North side of the altar. Probably the animal, depending on the kind, was tied to one of the 4 horns of the Altar; then its throat was slit. Actually what the procedure did was to cut the main artery going through the animal's neck (that fed blood to the brain) thereby causing almost immediate unconsciousness and death. The Bible uses a very specific word for the slaying of the sacrificial animal, *shahat*, and it's meaning includes the exact way that the animal was to be slain, so as to be as humane and painless and quick as possible; and it was done in a manner that would allow some or all of its blood to be captured in an authorized sacrificial vessel. The blood was then offered to God and finally splashed on the sides of the Brazen Altar.

Next, the animal was skinned and then chopped up, sectioned, into pieces. Typically the worshipper was also responsible to do this task, as well as to wash the interior organs with water; but that diminished over time and the priests and Levites took over more and more of that task. Then the attending priest would put the chunks of meat onto the Altar, one by one, to be consumed by the fire. A slightly different procedure occurs if the burnt offering, the 'olah, is to be a bird, because its size and anatomy makes cutting it's throat and sectioning it impractical. Notice how the worshipper, the common man, performs most of the duties, and the priest simply officiates, catches the blood in a ritual container, splashes it on the sides of the Altar, and then puts the meat into the flames. When we can visualize this scene, we begin to understand how passive and sterile the Church has become in our worship activities. Our involvement in worship is usually reduced to showing up. Not so by God's plan. The Worshipper was an active participant in worship.....in this case, the sacrificing procedures.

Now, what was the PURPOSE of the burnt offering? Well as I told you in our Introduction to Leviticus not every one of the Sacrificial System's ritual sacrifices was about sin. Interestingly the very first sacrifice ordained in Leviticus, the **'olah**, was NOT for atonement of a sin that a worshipper might have committedat least not in the way one might typically think of it. Rather it has to do, as vs. 3 tells us, with asking God to accept you by allowing you, the worshipper who brought the sacrifice, to come-near to God. Peace with God is the aim. The **'olah** was seen as a gift from the worshipper to God; a kind of a combination gift and ransom. And, even though the **'olah** is technically classified as a food offering, it's not that the Hebrews thought the animal was somehow food for their God. Rather, as I mentioned earlier, it's more about the smoke that was emitted from the burning flesh that ascended upward to God in the Heavens that was in their minds. That when God "smelled" the smoke, it was pleasing to Him....it gave Him pleasure.... because it indicated a) that an individual was being obedient to His commands and b) peace, Shalom, was taking place. In other words God desperately wants men to be at peace with Him. So much so that He set up this system that cost Yehoveh millions upon millions of His valuable living creatures, creatures that He dearly cared about; but Mankind meant so much MORE to Him that He, for our sakes, didn't spare even those beautiful innocent creaturesand it pleased Him to do it to attain His goal of peace with Man. When Christ died we're also told that "it pleased God" for His own son to be sacrificed.....because it brought Man another step closer to universal and eternal peace with Yehoveh.

So it is the aroma of the smoke from the **'olah** that pleases God. It would not be incorrect to say that the smoke of the sacrifice soothed God and this allowed God to have a more favorable attitude toward that man who was making the **'olah**. Yet, let's remember, a man did NOT bring a burnt offering when he committed a sin.....that was NOT the purpose of the burnt offering. It was brought regularly for the primary reason of maintaining a good relationship with God, by means of seeking to please Him by means of obedience to God's ordained sacrificial rituals. The **'olah** did NOT remove sin NOR did it in any way change the worshipper. That is, the worshipper's own sinful nature did not become transformed as the result of the burnt offering....only God's attitude toward this sinner was altered. However there is enough evidence in Leviticus and from the various OT prophets and even from the writers of the Psalms that some sort of atoning-like process was taking place with the ritual of the burnt offering. The best way I can describe to you is that the burnt offering has to do with a man's overall sinful condition, not some particular act of sin that somebody has committed. And I think that "atoning" is probably not the best word for our Western culture, because atoning carries with it the idea that something you did was brought before God but with this ritual sacrifice it was now "wiped clean" and forgiven. And it seems very clear that the burnt offering is not for wiping clean something you did; rather it's a gift of ransom because of WHO you are: a creature who's very nature is sinful. And this gift is necessary in order to allow you, an imperfect creature, to approach the most holy and perfect God. An **'olah** is a voluntary offering for the individual. It is done as a matter of the heart. It is acknowledging one's corrupt condition and signifies complete surrender to Yehoveh's justice system and His will. So as difficult as semantics can be when dealing with the OT, I think the better way to understand the **'olah** is that it paves the way for reconciliation between corrupt man and perfect God. It also wouldn't be wrong to say that the burnt offering offered a protection from God's wrath.

As one of the better examples in the Bible of the spiritual significance of the burnt offering, which occurs even before the Sacrificial System is given to Moses, is the near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham. The elements are that Isaac was to be killed and burned up on an altar. And, we can see from the story that this also was not about some sin or another that either Isaac or Abraham had committed. So what was it about? As a burnt offering, an 'olah, it was about total surrender and obedience to God on the part of the worshipper.....Abraham. It also demonstrated the principle of substitution when Isaac was replaced by a Ram that had been caught by his horns in some nearby thorn bushes. And the sacrifice displayed the idea of ransom..... that Isaac was to be a price paid, voluntarily, in order that mankind could be at peace with God.

Of course this was not carried out because Yehoveh stopped the process just short of Isaac's death. So why do all this.....what was the point to put Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac through this horrible ordeal, only to pull up short? It was BOTH a shadow of the future Levitical Sacrificial system (the Isaac incident took place more than 500 years before the Exodus), and of Jesus who was even MORE future. In the end, God the Father took Abraham's role, and Yeshua of Nazareth took Isaac's role. Only, this time, Yehoveh didn't stop the process, because this was the real deal.....the sacrifice of Jesus was what God had been preparing for since before He created Adam.

We will see as we move along that the burnt offering was often done in combination with other types of sacrifices....particularly if those other types of sacrifices were performed in order to atone for the commission of a sin. But in chapter 1 the foundational principles behind all sacrifices are being established. And chief among these principles is that a priest from the tribe of Levi MUST officiate over the sacrifice otherwise it is not only invalid, it is liable to bring defilement upon the holy sanctuary. This is a large departure from the way things were for Israel up to that time; because until these sacrificial laws were given to Moses each Hebrew family performed their own rites and rituals with the senior firstborn of the family acting as a sort of family priest. This centuries-old tradition was now outlawed and turned over to the newly established Priesthood of Israel. By the way: Israel did not easily accept this new reality and the firstborns in particular did not appreciate the loss of status that these Laws of Moses took from them.

The other thing that we find is that only the Priests are authorized to handle the blood of the sacrificial creature; further some amount of the blood from EVERY sacrifice had to be captured and splashed onto the holy altar. If an animal's blood was NOT splashed onto the Altar the sacrifice may as well have never taken place. Blood is the whole point to a sacrifice. We've lightly covered the reason for the requirement that the blood MUST be splashed onto the Brazen Altar in lessons from Exodus, and we will cover it again; but for now suffice it to say that it was ONLY by means of the blood of the animal contacting the Altar that the holiness of the Altar infected the sacrificial blood with holiness. A preeminent Biblical principle of holiness is that once God declares an object or person to be holy, that state of holiness can be transmitted from object to object, object to person, person to person, and person to object merely by means of contact. In the same way a defiled object or person who touches an otherwise holy object or person infects them with impurity. This is the reason that whatever is holy MUST be kept separate from anything that is common or defiled.

In order that the blood of the sacrificial animal be efficacious it MUST, somehow, attain a state of holiness or it cannot be presented to God. Neither the sacrificial animal nor its blood is inherently holy; some magic thing doesn't happen when an animal is singled out as a sacrifice and its blood spilled. But that blood BECOMES holy the instant it comes into contact with the Brazen Altar, and the incredibly holy state of that altar of God transmits its own holiness to the blood that has been splashed upon it. NOW the blood is suitable for its purpose.

Next week we'll take up Leviticus chapter 2 and discuss the next most common sacrifice called in Hebrew the ***Minchah***.