

Leviticus-Numbers

June 7, 2009

Introduction/Leviticus 1-7

I. **Background on Leviticus**

Leviticus is the third book of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). It is also referenced as the Law, Mosaic Law, or Torah, although more properly these references belong to the entire Pentateuch.

The name Leviticus is from the Septuagint Greek translation of the OT and means “relating to the Levites.” The original Hebrew title was “and he called” from the first word in Hebrew in the book consistent with the Hebrew naming system for all five books of the Pentateuch.

Leviticus gives details of priestly regulations and procedures not found in Exodus. G. F. A. Knight explains, “The book of Leviticus, being part of the Holy Scripture, reveals various aspects of God’s atoning purpose when he used sacrifice, and then priesthood necessary to administer it, in order to accomplish his loving will for all men within the bonds of the covenant that he made with Israel.”

However, one over emphasis of the book originates with the higher critics who suggest that the book was written by Priests to justify why they did what they did and that it was written during the Diaspora (P source). Obviously, this is inconsistent with the Bible’s own testimony. For this class, we will assume that this book was written by Moses, shortly after the events of Exodus and within a year or so of the Israelites having left Egypt.

An outline of the books follows:

1. The five main offerings (1-7)
2. Ordination, installation and work of Aaron and sons (8-10)
3. Laws of cleanness—food, childbirth, etc. (11-15)
4. Day of Atonement/worship at the tabernacle (16-17)
5. Moral laws covering incest, honesty, idolatry, etc. (18-20)
6. Regulations for priests, offerings, and annual feasts (21-24:9)
7. Punishment for blasphemy, murder, etc. (24:10-23)
8. Sabbath year, jubilee, land tenure, and reform of slavery (25)
9. Blessings and curses for covenant obedience and disobedience (26)
10. Regulations for offerings owed to the Lord (27)

The key theme to the book is “...be holy because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44b, 19:2, and quoted in I Peter 1:15-16. Obviously, as the I Peter quote demonstrates, this has great importance to us today.

II. Why Have Sacrifices?

Hosea 6:6

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

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What message was God sending to his people in these chapters? What are the messages that might be associated with sacrifices?

What concepts of God might a Jew derive in 1400 B.C. from performing these sacrifices? What concepts do we see when we look back to those sacrifices that we might be able to apply today?

III. Leviticus 1-7: Five Main Offerings

God determine when, how, and where these sacrifices/offerings were to be made. [“Seek the Lord while he may be found (Isa. 55:6)] It should be noted that the sacrifices were costly to those making the offering (2 Sam. 24:24). The blood always had to be drained so that it not would be a part of burning. The fat was reserved for God; unlike perhaps, the way many of us feel today, it was considered the choice portion. The altar fire had to be kept burning continuously, signifying unceasing worship.

Burnt Offering (1:1-17)

This sacrifice involved cost, pain, and identified the one making the offering with the sacrifice. It was generally offered to relieve the impact of sin. A successful sacrifice was “...an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” Basically, those making this offering received no direct benefit from it other than to please God...unlike some of the other offerings which had a more direct tangible worldly benefit to those making the offering. The sacrifice was entirely burnt up; the sacrifice was voluntary.

Grain [Cereal] Offering (2:1-16)

A thanksgiving gift to God, combining the concepts of the grace of God’s creation with man’s labor in bringing it to fruition. This offering was much less expensive to make so that even the poorest could afford it.

Fellowship or Peace Offering (3:1-17)

A voluntary form of communion with God. Those making the offering participated in eating the sacrifice in a communal meal (think of it as a Church-wide BBQ). Some suggest that it typifies our Lord’s Supper celebration, although it would have likely been a day-long celebration. In many cases, the offering would be the only time that the Israelites would eat the meat of animals that could be sacrificed. Deuteronomy establishes the dedication of animals for this offering as part of the tithe and makes them mandatory.

Sin [Purifying] Offering (4:1-5:13)

This offering is concerned with purifying the place where God is worshipped. Given that the Israelites (and we) are part of a corrupt world, our very presence corrupts the worship of God. This offering is mandatory because of “unintentional sin.”

Guilt [Reparation] Offering (5:14-6:7, 7:1-6)

This is considered mandatory for sins against or involving holy objects, forbidden objects, or neighbors. A sin against a neighbor is equated to a sin against God.

IV. Our Sacrifices Today

The above sacrifices, and others, were intended to help the Israelites live their lives with God in mind... what He would have them do in each and every situation. Sacrifices were never intended to make sin be OK, but rather to point out or convict the heart of wrongdoing to God; the ultimate goal of the sacrifice for the people to act the way God wants them to act. The sacrifice is not important, as the intent of the heart is much more important.

So, are we to offer sacrifices to God today?

The answer is a resounding “yes,” but we do not do it with animals. Instead, the method of sacrifice is much more direct to our hearts, given that God resides in us through the Spirit. See:

Romans 12:1-2

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in light of God’s mercy that you offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God... holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

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This is an important passage to consider and re-consider as we go through Leviticus and Numbers. As we look to the OT, we should also learn more about God and how we should interact with Him. If we read the OT, and it is not transforming us, we should attempt to understand why. Paul’s statement in 2 Tim 3:16 about all Scripture being God-breathed and valuable to the Christian probably referred more, at the time that it was written, to the OT than the NT, although obviously it refers to both.

So, how do we offer our bodies as living sacrifices?

How do we cease conforming to the pattern of the world?

What can we do to help in the renewal of our minds?

Do you see the goodness of God in your life?

And having asked these questions and perhaps answering them with a NT perspective, the question of the value of the OT arises again. How can the OT help us in our walk with God, in us constantly growing as Christians?

Old Testament Sacrifices

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NAME	OT REFERENCES	ELEMENTS	PURPOSE
BURNT OFFERING	Lev 1; 6:8-13; 8:18-21; 16:24	Bull, ram or male bird (dove or young pigeon for poor); wholly consumed; no defect	Voluntary act of worship; atonement for unintentional sin in general; expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God
GRAIN OFFERING	Lev 2; 6:14-23	Grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, baked bread (cakes or wafers), salt; no yeast or honey; accompanied burnt offering and fellowship offering (along with drink offering)	Voluntary act of worship; recognition of God's goodness and provisions; devotion to God
FELLOWSHIP OFFERING	Lev 3; 7:11-34	Any animal without defect from herd or flock; variety of breads	Voluntary act of worship; thanksgiving and fellowship (it included a communal meal)
SIN OFFERING	Lev 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young bull: for high priest and congregation 2. Male goat: for leader 3. Female goat or lamb: for common person 4. Dove or pigeon: for the poor 5. Tenth of an ephah of fine flour: for the very poor 	Mandatory atonement for specific unintentional sin; confession of sin; forgiveness of sin; cleansing from defilement
GUILT OFFERING	Lev 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6	Ram or lamb	Mandatory atonement for unintentional sin requiring restitution; cleansing from defilement; make restitution; pay 20% fine

When more than one kind of offering was presented (as in Nu 6:16, 17), the procedure was usually as follows: (1) sin offering or guilt offering, (2) burnt offering, (3) fellowship offering and grain offering (along with a drink offering). This sequence furnishes part of the spiritual significance of the sacrificial system. First, sin had to be

dealt with (sin offering or guilt offering). Second, the worshiper committed himself completely to God (burnt offering and grain offering). Third, fellowship or communion between the Lord, the priest and the worshiper (fellowship offering) was established. To state it another way, there were sacrifices of expiation

(sin offerings and guilt offerings), consecration (burnt offerings and grain offerings) and communion (fellowship offerings—these included vow offerings, thank offerings and freewill offerings).