

Leviticus 1 - 5
Instructions for Sacrifices
December 16, 2018

Next Lesson. Leviticus 6-10

Proverbs28:7. “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.”

Wesley's Questions for Class Meetings. #21. “Is Christ real to me?”

What does the Bible Mean?

Background on Leviticus.

Leviticus or the Hebrew Lev (“He (the Lord) Called) is the third book of the Torah (law) or the Pentateuch (five books). The book is primarily concerned with the Levites (priests). One Hebrew title means “Instructions of the Priests.” It is a “Manual of the Priests.” The book allows the priests to understand their role as teachers and employees of the tabernacle.

The book dates to the earliest times and its construction shows that it has always been a distinct, separate text. The book plays off the numbers 3 and 12. Thirty speeches of God are introduced by “the Lord said.” The book has 12 major summarizing statements and so the book is divided into 12 sections. Twelve symbolizes completeness and the twelve tribes of Israel.

As noted earlier, Leviticus is the center of the Pentateuch. It is the heart of Israel’s stay at Mt. Sinai. In Exodus Israel had come to Mt. Sinai and had entered into a covenant with Yahweh. Moses received instructions for the tabernacle. The people worshiped the golden calf. A new covenant was made. The tabernacle was constructed. God took residence in the tabernacle. Thus Leviticus begins with a statement by God to Moses in the tabernacle for the people.

The entire book emphasizes that instructions are from the Lord and are for the entire community. The book begins with “The Lord called ...,” which is the name of the book. In Exodus Moses went to the mountain to meet and hear God. Now God entered the community and spoke from the tabernacle. The life of the community is to function in the context of God being in the midst of the community. It is an invitation to holiness which is the principal teaching of the book. The word “holy” occurs more often in Leviticus than in any other Biblical book. Wesley said that holiness is total dedication to God and total separation from all that draws us away from God. (Once I heard a preacher ask the question, “How would I behave if God lived in my house?” This is the context for Leviticus.) The instructions were carried out as prescribed and formed the community to the words of Yahweh. God brings order to Israel as he had brought order to creation

The book is not merely a book of ritual. As the chapters progress we will see a divine call to holy relationships in the family, in business, in judicial proceedings, in worship and in day to day activity.

Read. Leviticus 1:1-17. *The Burnt Offering*

Today's readings outline the basic forms of sacrificial rites and offerings. The first chapter deals with burnt offerings. The accounts are only a framework. For example, sounds and movements are not detailed. Much is left to interpretation.

The sacrifices are to come from the herd (cattle), flock (sheep) or livestock (domesticated animals only). "You shall bring" (should *choose* to bring). Offerings are *voluntary*. They allow us to draw near to God. Male animals were the most frequently offered because too many males were useless to the farmer. Without blemish meant normal, healthy animals. The aroma of the offering pleased the Lord. After the one making the offering brought it and slaughtered it. Then the duties of the priests began – to sprinkle the blood, skin the animal and cut it into pieces, to build the fire and arrange the sacrifice and to wash parts and "burn all of it on the altar."

In general, sacrifices cover the range of human emotions – joy, sorrow, thanks, wonder, guilt, relief and hope. Sacrifice was the way people could express their experiences in the context of the sacred.

Wesley says that sacrificial giving is a part of holiness. Leviticus gives instructions for sacrificial giving. We do sacrifice animals, but we may be called to give time or treasure. When we give sacrificially we discover that we are created to be givers. We are created, God intends us to share generously or *significantly* of what we have. It is an important part of being human.

Read. Leviticus 2: 1-16. *Grain Offerings.*

Grain offerings could substitute for animal offerings especially for the poor. The offerings could be uncooked, baked, toasted, fried or roasted. No leaven or honey (probably including jelly) could be used. Probably fermentation associated with yeast and honey and jelly was the reason. Salt was to be included. If the grain offerings were first fruits – fresh and not having been subject to drying – they could be roasted and presented as coarse new grain (or grits).

Read. Leviticus 3: 1-17. *The Fellowship Offering* or Peace Offering

These sacrifices reflect a wide range of human emotions – thankfulness and hopes, for examples.

The offering was a burnt offering. If it were of the herd (cattle), God received the viscera (it was burned) and God therefore shared in the offering. The fat (and suet), the

kidneys and liver were also burned. The rules varied slightly for sheep and goats. Burnt offerings were made each morning for the nation as a whole. Leviticus 3:5, says that these offerings should be burned on top of the daily burnt offering for the nation. 3:11,16, refer to being burned for food. They were not food to eat, but gifts to God which he received with delight. In 3:16, says, "All the fat is the Lord's." Fat was the best part.

The offerings in Chapters 1 – 3 are *voluntary* – presented at the initiative of the giver. The giver is moved to express love and gratitude for God's goodness and to be drawn closer to God. Shalom or the peace offering describes the relationship between the giver and God.

Read. Leviticus 4:1 - 5:13. *Sin Offerings* or Purification Offerings.

This section represents mandatory sacrifices that are required by God. Serious religious sins or severe uncleanness or impurity (lasting for more than seven days) defiled the pure. Intentional and unreported sins contaminated the Holy of Holies. Communal non-deliberate sin contaminated the outer shrine. Individual non-deliberate sin contaminated the altar. The purpose of the sacrifice was to remove the wrongdoer's contaminant from the holy. The need for the offering might be inadvertent sin such as forgetting to carry out an instruction or being ignorant of a law. First the guilty "must confess in what way he has sinned."

The sin offerings are on behalf of sins by the anointed priest, the whole community, a leader or a member of the community. The anointed priest would be the high priest. All high priests sinned except for the high priest Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:1-3; 7:26-28). Sin offerings required that the purity of the holy places be restored. Therefore the blood of the sacrifice must be taken inside the tent or on the altar.

The enactment of the ritual by the priest *atones* or sets right the violations of the good order of creation.

Chapter 5, verses 7-13, define four situations that require purification. A person hears a public call to testify but refuses to do so. A person touches an unclean animal carcass and is unaware. A person touches an unclean person and is unaware. A person makes a rash oath and is unaware. When one realizes his guilt he must *confess* and sacrifice a lamb or a goat to atone for the sin.

The requirements recognize that the poor may not be able to afford a lamb or goat. Two doves or a grain offering may be made instead.

Read. Leviticus 5:14-19. *The Guilt Offering* or Trespass Offering or Offerings with Restitution

This is when a sin prohibited in the Torah (violates the sacred realm or misappropriates holy things) is committed unintentionally "even though he does not know it." It is very

similar to the sin offering. The major difference is that the Guilt offering was brought in cases where restitution for the sin was possible and therefore required such as theft or stealing or cheating. A ram valued in silver was required. Perhaps one could offer payment in lieu of sacrifice or perhaps the value of the ram had to be proportional to the sin. In addition, the guilty party had to pay the value of restitution plus one-fifth. The guilt of unknowing trespasses could be atoned by sacrifice alone without restitution.

What does the Bible mean to me?

1. How would you define “sacrifice”?
2. How do your “sacrifices” define your value system? For whom do you make “sacrifices”?
3. How do you describe your “offering” to God?
4. How do you feel about sermons on stewardship?
5. What can you do to ensure a proper attitude toward giving in church?
6. When have you felt most alienated from God? How do you rebuild your relationship?
7. Do you feel responsible for sins that are “unintentional”? Is ignorance bliss?