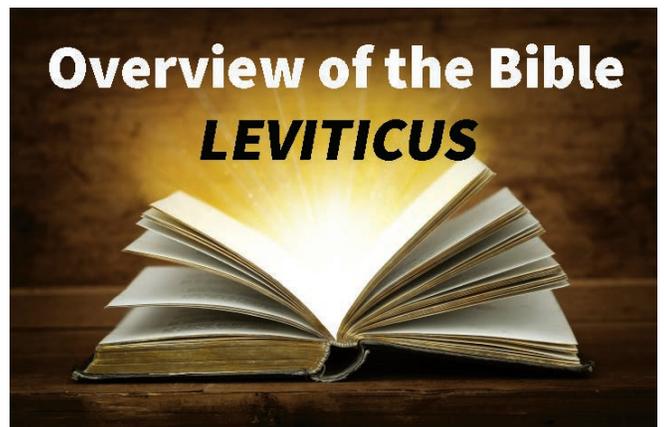


LEVITICUS:

The Sacrificial System

Leviticus 1-7 – Lesson 19
Wednesday, September 9, 2020



The book gets its name from the fact that it contains instructions for the priest. Leviticus divides naturally into five major units:

1. Laws about sacrifice (1-7)
2. Laws about priestly ordination (8-10)
3. Laws about physical and moral impurities (11-16)
4. Laws about vows (27)

Leviticus is addressed to the members of a believing community. The covenant is in the past, and the marriage relationship is well under way. Exodus ended by devoting a good bit of attention to where God is to be worshiped—in the tabernacle. Leviticus extends the theme to include how God is to be worshiped. In Exodus the emphasis is on locality. In the Leviticus the emphasis is on attitude and proper relationships.

More than any other book in the OT, Leviticus summons Israel to a holy life. Precisely what is involved in the holy life will surface as we make our way through the book. But for starters, we know that the word “*holy*” occurs in this book of the Bible more often than in any other.

It is to be thought that Leviticus addresses the holiness demanded exclusively, or even primarily, of the priest, we should observe that just the opposite is the situation. The book is addressed to all the people.

Description of the Sacrifices

The first seven chapters are devoted to a description of the sacrifices ordained by God that bear on the relationship between humankind and God. Worship without sacrifice is inconceivable. Wherever sin has driven a wedge between God and humankind, both sacrifice and repentance become incumbent upon the sinner.

But as we will see, some sacrifices have nothing to do with sin and atonement. And we should also note that the sacrifices described in chs. 1-7 are not an exhaustive listing. The emphasis in these opening chapters of Leviticus is on private offerings/sacrifices versus public ones—that is, the sacrifices that the common Israelite would have offered to God most repeatedly.

The five sacrifices are:

1. The whole burnt offering (Lev. 1): called in Hebrew the *ola*, “*that which goes up*,” and in the Septuagint, “*holocaust*”
2. The cereal offering (Lev. 2): involving here exclusively cereal products
3. The peace/fellowship/well-being offering (Lev. 3): perhaps a covenant meal
4. The sin offering (Lev. 4:5-13): a sacrifice of repentance for sins
5. The guilt offering/reparation offering (Lev. 5:14-6:7): also, a sacrifice of repentance for sins, but additionally underscoring the need of restitution; thus, a special kind of sin offering

Immediately one can distinguish between points 1-3 and 4-5. The first three climax, in their respective narration, with the impact that such a sacrifice has on God. Such sacrifice, when offered, becomes “*a pleasing odor to the Lord.*”

1. 1:9, 13, 17 (whole burnt)
2. 2:2, 9, 12; 6:15, 21 (cereal)
3. 3:5, 16 (peace)

In connection with the last two sacrifices the phrase appears only in 4:31. By contrast, a unique phrase occurs repeatedly in the narrative of the last two sacrifices: *"the priest shall make atonement for him/them and he/they shall be forgiven"* (9 references).

4. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13 (sin)
5. 5:16, 18; 6:7 (guilt)

The first three sacrifices move to their climax in indicating their result on God: to him it is a pleasing aroma/odor. In receiving the offerings God experiences pleasure.

The last two sacrifices move to their climax in indicating their result on the one who gives the offering: that person is forgiven.

There is a second difference between the two categories of sacrifices. None of the first three sacrifices is identified with either an occasion that prompts the sacrifice or a particular violation that elicits it. They are to be spontaneous acts, sacrifices offered to God in praise and thanksgiving.

By contrast, the latter two sacrifices are identified with a specific occasion: *"if anyone sins unwittingly in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done..."* (4:2). This sacrifice covers the inadvertent violation of God's prohibitive laws. The guilt offering also addresses itself to inadvertent violations, not in the area of the prohibitive laws, but in the area of *"any of the holy things of the Lord"* (5:15).

From this distinction there emerges in the biblical narration a third difference between the two categories of sacrifices. This distinction involves the use of the blood. In the first three sacrifices (really only the whole burnt offering and the peace offering) the blood of the sacrifices animal is thrown/sprinkled by the priest against the outer altar, the bronze altar (1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13), or drained out against the side of this altar. The same procedure is followed in the sin offering of one of the rulers or tribal chieftains (4:25), and in the sin offering of one of the common people (4:30,34), But even here, instead of the priest sprinkling the blood against the side of the outer altar, he *"puts"* some of the blood on the horns of the altar and *"pours out"* the remainder of the blood at the altar's base.

However, in the case of the sin offering of either the priest or the whole congregation the picture is changed. In these two situations the blood is brought by the priest into the tent of meeting. Some of the blood is then *"sprinkled"* seven times before the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Some is put on the horns of the altar of incense. The remainder is poured at the base of the outer, brazen altar (4:5-7, 16-18). This the Bible's way of saying that the greater the offender, the greater the offense. In addition, Lev.6:30 specifically prohibits the eating of the flesh of the sin offering if the animal's blood has been brought into the tent of the meeting. Here incineration, not consumption, is the mandate.

Common Elements among the Sacrifices

The majority of the sacrifices here prescribed in Leviticus has several common denominators.

1. The Worshiper Brings a Gift

The worshiper never comes into the presence of the Lord empty-handed.

2. The Meaning of the Gift

The gift that is brought is frequently described as a qorban, usually translated as *"offering."* It is used at least once to describe each of the five sacrifices except the guilt offering. Leviticus and Numbers have a

monopoly on this word. It appears 38 times in Numbers, 39 times in Leviticus (31 of which are in chs.1-7), and only twice more in the OT. A more literal translation of the word than "offering" is "a things brought near." The sacrifices thus are concerned with the issue of how one can live in nearness to God.

3. The Description of the Gift

The offering overwhelmingly is a domesticated animal-bull, goat, or sheep. Occasionally, grains are offered. The offering of grains rather than animals seems to depend on the range of one's financial resources. Yet it is that which is most costly, most valuable, that is given to God. And that is not all: the animal that if offered is to be without blemish.

4. The Gift Depends on One's Resources

In most of the sacrifices in Leviticus, that which is to be presented is graded according to the donor's ability and resources. For example, the burnt offering may be a bull (1:3-5), a sheep or goat (1:10), or a bird (1:14). No exorbitant demands are placed on those of meager means. The point is not equal offering, but equal sacrifice.

5. The Donor Participates in the Ritual

The person who brings an offering is actively involved in the ritual and is not a passive spectator. The donor presents the sacrificial victim and in doing so, lays a hand on the animal's head (1:4, 3:2, 8, 13, 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). The Hebrew word for "lay (the hand)," *samak*, is the one that normally means to apply some pressure rather than a mere touch.

6. The Worshiper's Responsibility

After the animal is brought to the place of worship, the worshiper, not the priest, kills the animal (by cutting its throat). The Hebrew word that is used for "kill" is *sahat*. Its use is normally restricted to ritual killing, and it appears eighty-four times in the OT thirty-six of which are in Leviticus. In addition to slaying the animal, the worshiper was responsible for skinning and dissecting the animal and washing the entrails (1:6-9, 12-13).

7. The Priest's Responsibilities

The sacrificial victim's blood is drained and then scattered around or on either the outer or the inner altar, depending on which sacrifice is involved. This is specifically a priestly duty (1:5, 11, 15, 3:2, 8, 13, 4:5-7).

8. Disposing of the Sacrificial Victim

Various procedures were followed in the disposition of the sacrificial victim. In the burnt offering the entire animal was consumed (1:9,13) except the hide, which went to the priest (7:8). Some of the cereal offering was given to the priest for food (2:3, 10, 6:16, 18). In the sin offering some of the animal was burned on the altar by the priest. This included the choice entrails and the suet over and on the entrails (4:8-10). In the case of the sin offering of the priest and the congregation, the carcass and the remaining entrails were burned outside the camp as refuse (4:11, 12, 21), but not in the case of the laity's sin offering. Additionally, we are informed that the priest could not eat the flesh of the sin offering brought by himself or the congregation (6:30).

The peace offering is unique. It is the one sacrifice that has multiple ways of disposition of the meat. Part is consumed on the altar (3:3-5). Another part is given to the priests (7:31-35). The third element is the most radical departure. The person who have the offering also ate part of the sacrificial victim (7:15-21). This is the only sacrifice in which that permission is granted. It is for this reason that warnings about "eating blood" come in the context of the peace offering (3:17, 7:26, 27, 17:10, 12, 14). In eating the meat, the worshiper must be certain that all the blood has been drained. In this one instance God invites His people into His presence to share a meal with him and with one another.