

Lesson 14: Leviticus 1-7 and 23-27 Ritual

Introduction

Why study Leviticus? It is not an easy book to study. There is very little narrative. And it is especially dedicated to kingdom requirements, the stipulations of covenant between God and Israel. These are the dos and don'ts of relationship with God. But these are the dos and don'ts of their covenant, not the do's and don'ts of our covenant. We have a new covenant. So, why study Leviticus?

I'll give you four reasons.

1. First, and this is true of our whole study of the Pentateuch, we study the Old Covenant in order to better understand the New Covenant. When we see the continuity between the two covenants, we gain deeper insight into what is foundational. These things have always been true, for our culture and for their culture. These are the things that stay the same. And when we see the discontinuity, we gain insight into what is special about our covenant. What was not working in the Old? We want to let go of what God wants us to let go. What is special about the New? We want to grab onto that which God specially designed to make the New Covenant a better covenant. Studying the Old helps us to fully live in the New. That's one reason we need to study Leviticus.

2. Second, there is practical truth here for us to apply. God's laws provide for and protect his people. Not all of those laws apply to us directly in the New Covenant. So, we are going to have to think about what does apply and what does not apply and why? We can't just arbitrarily pick and chose. And we will talk about that later. But even the laws that do not apply, such as ceremonial rituals and the food laws and the various festivals, those commands were given for a purpose. And if we can understand how Israel experienced protection, provision, teaching through those commands, then we can gain practical wisdom and principles to apply in our New Covenant life.

3. Third, knowing Leviticus enables us to answer some tough questions about the Bible. Quite frankly, there are some strange and troubling commandments in Leviticus. So, how do we understand laws that seem to treat women as less valuable than men? And what do we do about the acceptance of slavery? And how do we explain the severity of God in his punishments? A study of Leviticus is going to give us a framework that we can use to help us understand, help us put into perspective what God was doing with these laws. And we need to seek understanding. If we are in a position of looking down on the law of God, we think something is wrong with this, then we are judging God himself as not good or not wise or not just. We need an appreciation for that which we find strange and troubling. We want to investigate the tough questions for our own understanding, but also so we can answer with some confidence sceptics and our kids.

4. Fourth, the Levitical code emphasizes the importance of being separate from human culture in worldview and in behavior. That's an emphasis that we can use today. We still struggle with the desire to conform our beliefs and behaviors to our culture. The Levitical code can challenge us to think about God's holy character, what holiness looks like, and how that should apply in New Covenant community. This is the main purpose of the book, to provide the Israelites with a way of approaching God that honors his holy character. The Levitical code provides a ritualized way of approaching God and a moral way of approaching God. God is honored both through ceremonial worship and through moral life practice. How do we set ourselves apart as holy in our worship of God?

The short Leviticus Overview video by the Bible Project does a great, great job explaining the Levitical code as a way of approach to our holy God. I really encourage you to check out this one. If you have not looked at any of the other Bible Project videos, this is one that you should not miss. It really helps with understanding the whole of the book. And you can check it out on youtube or at observetheword.com on the [Pentateuch Resources page](#).

Remember the great problem of the burning bush in Exodus. How does a holy God live among a sinful people without burning them up? God has determined to dwell among Israel. And that invites

fire into the camp. God's holiness is good and powerful but also destructive when in contact with sin. At the end of Exodus, God indwelt in the tabernacle, but not even Moses could enter into the tent due to the intensity of God's glory. God decided to maintain a barrier of holiness between himself and his people and at the same time he is giving them a way that they can draw near to him in relationship.

The Bible project will explain Leviticus as a seven-part chiasm. I think it is a wonderful structuring of the book. Chapters 1-7 and 23-27 at the beginning and end of the book form the outer frame. Both sections focus on ritual. The second frame is chapters 8-10 and 21-22. Both of these sections focus on the priesthood. The third frame is chapters 11-15 and 18-20. And these both focus on purity. Then in the very middle of the book, chapters 16-17, we have the Day of Atonement. And that center section is going to be our monument of grace for Leviticus.

Leviticus: Kingdom Requirements						
Key Passage: 19:2						
1-7 Ritual	8-10 Priesthood	11-15 Purity	16-17 Atonement	18-20 Purity	21-22 Priesthood	23-27 Ritual
Sacrifices	Consecration	Ceremonial cleanliness	Substitution	Moral cleanliness	Standards	Festivals, etc...

So, the three parallel sections give us ritual, priesthood and purity code, all of which emphasize the holiness of God and provide a way to set Israel apart as holy. We are going to spend five lessons on Leviticus. Today I am going to say a bit about the ritual sections at the beginning and end of the book. In the second lesson, I will address both of the priesthood sections. Then for the third and fourth lessons, I will address the two purity code sections separately, one after the other. And in our final lesson we consider the Day of Atonement. So, that's our plan.

Set apart as Holy

Before I address the ritual sections, I have one more reason to study Leviticus. Leviticus challenges us to resist the powerful pull to be conformed to our culture.

The purpose of Leviticus is not only to set up a way of approach that is holy. The Levitical code is also intended to transform the thought and behavior of the Israelites. If they are going to live out their purpose as a kingdom of priests and if they are going to grow in relationship with God, then their worldview must undergo transformation. And we have already gotten a glimpse into how hard that is going to be for the Israelites. The experience of God on Mount Sinai and the teaching directly from God from Mount Sinai did not root Egypt out of Israel. They still behaved out of the worldview that they brought with them from Egypt when they created the golden idol and said, "Here, this is Yahweh." And here is a great worry, that even if the thinking and behavior of Egypt does get rooted out, the Israelites will only replace it with the thinking and behavior of the land they are going into, of Canaan. Israel needs not only to root out what is wrong, Israel needs her own culture, a culture that is patterned after the truth of God.

This is one of the most important reasons for us to study Leviticus. All the rituals, the whole priesthood, all the purity laws, all of it together is meant to transform the thinking and behavior of the Israelites from a pagan worldview to a godly worldview. Who is God? Who are we? What's our mission? God knows that all people, everywhere are drawn like a magnet away from true worship to false worship. We need structures to help us, to help guide us towards what God is really like, towards what we are really like, towards what our purpose is. The compass of our hearts is broken. Our souls do not point to true north. It's constantly turning away from God. We turn from him, like the nations at Babel, determined to make a name for ourselves, to define our own gods, and create our own meaning. The society of man applies constant pressure on anyone who would follow God,

pressure to be conformed into the pattern of the world. The Levitical code exists to transform people into a pattern that is in line with the heart of God. God is establishing a new kind of culture.

Understanding how God intended the Levitical code to mold the thinking and behavior of the Israelites gives us principles to consider as we seek to develop Christian communities committed to transformation in holiness. How do we resist that pull of society, the pressure to make our Christianity more acceptable, more in line modern sensibilities, values, and behaviors? There is constant pressure to conform. Leviticus challenges to ask what rituals, what priestly leadership, what purity code do we have in place to help us resist that pressure.

We are a couple of weeks past Easter. In the United States newspapers tend to get a little spiritual at this time of year. Albert Mohler pointed out two articles in the *New York Times* that exemplify the work of society to mold Christianity into its own image. The first article is from April 19 by Jenna Wortham in the Style Section. She celebrates Easter as a worship of Spring. She makes this conclusion.

Our city has made this day into one of collective worship. The traditions remain the same: Those who are religious head to services and a meal. Those of us who aren't head to brunch, or maybe the park, sporting a freshly pressed suit, an elaborate hat, a big bow, a bright lip, a colorful jumpsuit or one of those delicate beaded Loeffler Randall bags that have suddenly and mysteriously become as ubiquitous as the cherry blossom trees in Brooklyn.

So, whether you go to church or brunch, it is all the same. There is really no difference. No one is set apart as holy. We are all worshippers, we are all holy no matter what we do.

It gets worse. The next day, on April 20, columnist Nicholas Kristof interviewed Serene Jones, a Protestant Minister and President of Union Theological Seminary. Here is a selection from that interview.

Kristof asked, "Isn't a Christianity without a physical resurrection less powerful and awesome? When the message is about love, that's less religion, more philosophy."

Jones responded, "For me, the message of Easter is that love is stronger than life or death. That's a much more awesome claim than that they put Jesus in the tomb and three days later he wasn't there. For Christians for whom the physical resurrection becomes a sort of obsession, that seems to me to be a pretty wobbly faith. What if tomorrow someone found the body of Jesus still in the tomb? Would that then mean that Christianity was a lie? No, faith is stronger than that."

Kristof then asks, "What about other miracles of the New Testament? Say, the virgin birth?"

Jones answers, "I find the virgin birth a bizarre claim. It has nothing to do with Jesus' message. The virgin birth only becomes important if you have a theology in which sexuality is considered sinful. It also promotes this notion that the pure, untouched female body is the best body, and that idea has led to centuries of oppressing women."

Kristof then asks, "What happens when we die?"

Jones responds, "I don't know! There may be something, there may be nothing. My faith is not tied to some divine promise about the afterlife."

Here is a woman who calls herself a Protestant Christian Minister and holds the position of theological seminary president, and she is denying the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, twisting the virgin birth, and telling us no one knows if there is an afterlife. For her, if there is holiness, if there is a being set apart, it is certainly not described in the text of the Bible, at least not without a lot of revision. She models for us the spirit of religious accommodation. We are not to be set apart. We are to conform, to fit in with society.

And Jesus knew this would be a problem for New Covenant believers. He prayed this for his disciples in John 17:19 the night of his arrest,

¹⁵ I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

Jesus declares that his followers are not of this world, but he has sent them to live in the world. And Jesus prays for God to sanctify his disciples by his truth. Sanctify means to set apart, to be made holy. The English word sanctify does not sound a lot like the word holy but in the Greek and in the Hebrew and in a lot of languages, sanctify and holy come from the same root word. To sanctify someone is to make them holy. And to holy is both to be set apart for special use and to be made clean for that use. We are to be set apart and made clean through the truth of God's word. That was also a major goal of Leviticus. God used ritual and the priesthood and the purity laws to set Israel apart to be clean and useful for relationship and for service.

I am not going to advocate a return to the Levitical code. God designed that covenant for them, and he has designed a New Covenant for us. The primary source for understanding New Covenant holiness is the New Testament, not the Old Testament. But studying Leviticus can challenge our thinking. Looking at their covenant may help us to understand our covenant with a new and enriched perspective.

So, let's consider how holiness worked in Leviticus, starting with the rituals sections in the first seven chapters and the last five chapters.

The Ritual Sections of Leviticus

Leviticus starts with these words in 1:1-3.

¹ Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ² "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. ³ 'If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.

The next seven chapters are all about details of sacrifice. And that makes a rough start to the book. We get hardly any explanation about the meaning or symbolism of the sacrifices. We just get the details of what animal to give, how to slaughter it, who gets to eat it. And it seems like a lot of detail.

At the end of the book we going to get a little more variety, but still a lot of detail about the ritual days and rules of redemption and rules for vows, and so on. So, this section is a little more interesting, there is a little more going on than the beginning which is all about sacrifice, but still, there is very little commentary and very little narrative.

To get into these sections, we need to follow the same principle for getting into the tabernacle detail in Exodus. We need to imagine ourselves offering the sacrifices, celebrating the festivals and practicing redemption or fulfilling a vow. We need to somehow get into it experientially, a little emotionally, and above all, we need to think about why we would do this. What would this mean for me if I was doing this? What would God want it to mean for me? Maybe that is even better.

I guess that the Israelites had some motivation. Things went terribly wrong when they sought to mold god into an image of their own liking. And I assume they would be asking, what are we supposed to do? What kind of worship does he want? No idol, that's for sure. What else? What about sacrifice? Is that the same as in Egypt or is that completely different, too.

I assume many Israelites would have been motivated by fear out of doing something wrong. So, they want to know what they are supposed to do. I imagine there were others who were motivated by a hope of blessing. If we satisfy God, he said he was going to give us good things. But I imagine there were some motivated by a desire to know God and be in relationship with him.

As we imagine performing sacrifice or celebrating the feasts or completing a vow, we can imagine too how we might be feeling. We can imagine obedience out of fear. We can imagine obedience out of blessing. We can imagine obedience of truly wanting to know God, that “I am offering this sacrifice God, because I truly want to know you. I want to get sin out of the way, or I want to give gratitude to you. I am making a vow because I really want to focus on you.” We could probably also imagine obedience out of boredom because it is some ritual that you have always had to do, and you are just having to do it over again but that would come later. For now, at least, its all new to them. So, I don’t think there is much boredom, yet.

If you had been there, when Moses began to read out to everyone the laws, and it started right away, chapter 1, verse 1, with rules for sacrifice, you would not have been surprised at all. In fact, Moses would have been meeting a felt need. You expected to sacrifice, so you want to know how to do it. You find it an interesting way to start the rule book. You are getting the useful kind of information you were hoping for. And you might be concerned though at how little detail Moses was giving you. You’ve probably got have 50 unanswered questions about how this is supposed to happen.

That’s the same problem we had with the tabernacle. From our perspective, we have no plan to do any of this. We are trying to pay close attention just in case there is any theological point or narrative detail tucked away in there somewhere, but our minds start to wander pretty quickly. It’s all different when you are going to have to step out in front of a crowd and be expected to know exactly what to do and what to say.

I remember the first time, I had to serve in a youth lovefeast. The details of how to serve had never crossed my mind, but I got nervous pretty quickly when it was my turn. I guess I better explain what a lovefeast is. Don’t worry, the term is used in the Bible in Jude 12. Though it is not quite the same thing. I grew up in the Moravian Church, a protestant denomination started in Czech, in Bohemia, which was renewed in Germany before showing up in North Carolina. And we’ve got some unique traditions in our church. For Easter, for example, if we were in the band, we had a German brass band, we got up early morning hours and drove around town, stopping at certain spots to play songs and wake people up to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We then had a sunrise service at one church and a later morning service at another church. We needed two bands because we would start the service inside the church and then all stroll over to the graveyard to finish the service. And one band would lead, and they played the first stanza of a hymn. Then the other band bringing up the rear, would play the second stanza, and it would go back and forth and everybody else is walking in between. And it took quite a bit of coordination between the bands and the choir and the congregation and the minister. So, there was quite a bit of detail to it.

But I am supposed to be talking about the lovefeast. Okay, Christmas lovefeast took even more coordination. So, at a lovefeast service everyone is given a mug of coffee and a simple bun to eat, and it symbolizes a fellowship meal. So, in the New Testament Acts very often believers would gather together, and they would have a meal that would include the Lord’s supper. So, for us the lovefeast is not the Lord’s supper. It is something else. We have the normal Lord’s supper with wine and bread. This is something different. This is a bun and coffee. It’s a lovefeast. And the servers all marched into the sanctuary in very orderly lines. And they knew exactly where to stop and which rows of people they were to cover. And the coffee mugs, they came in carried by a man on a wooden tray with a woman server to hand them out. And the handles of the mugs all had to point the same way. And the guy better have them pointing at the woman so she can easily pick them up off the tray and hand them down the row. And at Christmas we served 700 people in just a few minutes. And then everybody was out again until it was time to come back in and collect the coffee mugs. And there was singing and preaching all that going on in between. And then back in again to hand out lighted candles. So, the men are coming in with beeswax candles that are all already lit. And you have to move quickly because that beeswax burns down fast, so the coordination needed to be just right. And the main concern of the parents growing up was that none of their kids would light the hair of

the woman in front of them on fire. Which was especially dangerous in the big hair years of the 80s. Hair spray being very flammable. Talk about fire on a bush. So, that's Christmas.

And then Thanksgiving service had its particular requirements. So, we had a Thanksgiving Eve time at church. And there was a display of pumpkins and a cornucopia and sheaves of corn. And we brought food, usually canned goods to symbolize gratitude to God. And it was all then given to a local food bank. So, you wanted mom to remember that everybody was supposed to bring the food. And she usually did.

And that may seem like a lot of detail to you. But I promise you, it's not. If you are going to help serve at the lovefeast you need a lot more than that. If you are a woman, you better not take the mugs off all one side of the tray because then the man gets lopsided, and it all starts to spill. So, comparing these three festivals of Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving to the three main Jewish feasts in Leviticus, Passover, Weeks and Booths, I have no idea how they knew what they were supposed to do. We would need a small book to describe all the details of these Moravian ceremonies just to make sure everybody knows where they were supposed to stand. We only get 44 verses for all the feasts of Israel, not just the three, but there are more than that. It is really not much detail. It is the same with the sacrifices. It is seven chapters, yes, but it is not that much detail if you have to stand up there and do it.

So, I think we may need to rethink our understanding of what it was like to live under Mosaic law. There were rules about days and food and festivals and washings and different life events and sickness and moral behavior. But how often are you sick and how often do you have mold in the wall of your house? How often do you sacrifice? The sabbath is only once a week, and you do not worry about the details of the feast days until the time of the year comes. So, I imagine that a young father would be nervous the first few times he has to step forward and sacrifice. But after a couple of years it becomes basically second nature. You do not need to read it any more. You know what is going on. You know the details.

So, what looks like a lot of details in Leviticus is spread out over the week and throughout the year. And traditions may have added up a lot more laws by the time of Jesus. But during the time of Moses, just looking at Leviticus and Exodus and Deuteronomy, there is not really an overbearing amount of detail to follow. It may have been a bit overwhelming at first, as Israel is coming out of Egypt. There are coming out of a very different culture. And so, it is not second nature, yet. They have a lot to learn. But once you begin to practice it, you realize, "Wow, there is not really that much here. We are going to have to make up some of this as we go along. How do you really sacrifice? How do you kill the sheep?"

The details of the rituals and the purity laws are not to take over every aspect and control every aspect of Jewish life. The rituals ordered life, and they reminded the Israelites of truths about God and about their history with God. But the danger was probably less to do with being overwhelmed with detail and more with doing everything by rote once they got going. You can imagine that that is the real danger. That is becomes second nature. They know what to wash. They know what not to eat. You can't buy it in Israel anyway. It's like going to Istanbul. You can't get pork on your pizza even if you are at Pizza hut. It's not that problem. The culture knows how it is supposed to live. So, the greater danger, I think was not the overwhelming detail, but getting used to the detail and not engaging with the heart and with the mind. It would become very easy to forget what the purpose is.

If you keep your mind on the purpose, I imagine offering sacrifice to be a powerful, meaningful experience. So, let's go over that in detail a little bit more. Let's go over the sacrifices in chapters 1-7 just to give us an idea. And we will consider the types of sacrifices, the procedures for sacrifice, and the functions of the sacrifices.

Five types of sacrifice¹

There are five types of sacrifices in Leviticus 1-7. The text gives us two separate lists. It is the same five sacrifices in both lists. The first is in 1:2-6:7. That lists gives the regulations for the people who are offering the sacrifice. The second list is in 6:8-7:21 and that is where we find out what part goes to the priest, what part goes to God, and what part can the worshipper eat.

Regulations for the people

Burnt offering 1:2-17

Grain offering 2:1-16

Peace offering 3:1-17

Purification offering 4:1-5:13

Reparation offering 5:14-6:7

Regulations for the priests

Burnt offering 6:8-13

Grain offering 6:14-23

Purification offering 6:24-30

Reparation offering 7:1-10

Peace offering 7:11-21

The lists are not in the same order, probably because the first list groups together the three sacrifices said to produce a soothing aroma to the Lord. While the second list orders the offerings according to the holiness of the meat, starting with the burnt offering which is completely given over to God and ending with the peace offering which mostly goes to non-priests. It goes to the people who brought it to worship.

Common procedures for the sacrifices

Considering the procedure for sacrifices, there were several common procedures for all sacrifices.

1. First, all of the sacrifices except the grain offering involve meat.
2. Second, an individual brought his sacrifice to the tabernacle courtyard.
3. Third, the worshipper laid a hand on the animal's head before the slaughtering.
4. Fourth, the blood of the animal was collected by the priest and usually sprinkled on the side of the altar (for purification offerings some blood was put to a special use).
5. Fifth, the whole animal, or selected parts, was placed on the altar to be consumed by fire.
6. Sixth, usually the priests consumed any meat that was not consumed by the fire.

So, who do you think killed the animal before it was offered? Do you think it was the priest on duty?

So, let's read again from the first few verses of Leviticus, this is 1:3-5.

³ If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. ⁴ He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. ⁵ He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁶ He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.

It's not the priest, is it? The worshipper slays the animal. He selects it from his own herd. He brings it to the tabernacle. He lays his hands on it, which symbolically transferring his own sin onto the animal. And then he kills it. The priest takes some of the blood to sprinkle on the altar. But the worshiper is not finished, yet. It is his job to skin the animal and then butcher it. It is then that the priests take the pieces of the animal to the altar. This is not just for the burnt offering. It is the same for the peace offering in 3:2 and for the purification offering in 4:29. The ritual involves the worshipper fully in the process. It is not like going to the supermarket to buy your hamburger wrapped in plastic that was cut up by somebody else. The normal person shares in the experience of life and death when he comes to offer the sacrifice. It is powerful imagery. It is powerful experience.

¹ Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 2002.

And we should also note that the majority of the meat of the offerings is eaten. It is not wasted. It is eaten either by the priests or by the worshippers. And the skin is also given as an offering to the priests. The meat and skin were not wasted. The sacrifices of Israel are one of the ways that God supports the priests.

So, those are the types of sacrifice and the some of the procedures of sacrifice, and now let's consider some of the functions of sacrifice, because each of the sacrifices served a special function.

Specialized functions for the sacrifices

1. Burnt offering

First, we have the burnt offering. The burnt offering, as suggested by the name, is consumed totally by the fire. None of it is eaten. It is a complete giving over. Leviticus 1:4 indicates that this offering is especially to make atonement, a term that probably includes both the idea of covering over sin and the idea of making a ransom or a payment for sin. In the case of the burnt offering where the sacrifice is given wholly over to the Lord, resulting in a pleasing aroma, the idea of ransom stands out more than the idea of covering. The total destruction of the sacrifice by fire is affirming the idea of substitutionary atonement. The animal is standing in place, is a substitute for the worshipper.

2. Grain offering

For the grain offering, the Hebrew word for grain offering *mincha* is translated elsewhere as tribute. A tribute is a payment made by a lesser king to a greater king. And presumably this offering was made to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and was received by the priests as his representative. Only a small portion was burnt on the altar. But the worshipper never ate any of the remainder. It is a gift completely given over to God received by the priests.

3. Peace offering

The peace offering might be offered as an offering of thanksgiving or as a freewill gift or as the result of a vow. And though some parts of the peace offering were burnt on the altar to God and other parts were given to the priests, most of the peace offering was eaten by the worshipper and by his family. So, this offering has also been called a fellowship offering to emphasize that the worshippers, in eating the sacrifice, are enjoying a meal of fellowship with the Lord.

4. Purification offering

The purification offering is sometimes called sin offering because the word used for the offering can be translated as sin. Calling it a purification offering makes the purpose clearer. If the anointed priest or the whole community of Israel sinned unintentionally the blood of the purification offering was placed on the horns of the incense altar which stood inside the holy place. So, that is if it's the anointed priest or the whole community. If a leader or individual Israelite sinned unintentionally then the blood was put on the altar in the courtyard. And putting the blood on the altar shows that the purification offering was not intended to cleanse the sinner, that was more the role of the burnt offering for atonement, but the purification offering was to wash away the stain on the land or on the community which was brought about by the sin of the sinner.

5. Reparation offering

And then finally, we have the reparation offering. And it is sometimes translated as guilt offering but the Hebrew can mean reparation or compensation. And that idea of reparation is seen in Leviticus 6:5. Anyone who steals something or gains something by extortion or the perversion of justice is to restore back to the victim whatever was taken, adding an additional one-fifth of the price. And the

guilty person is also to present the guilt or reparation offering to the Lord. Two important points are made here. First, a principle of Israelite law is restoration of relationship. For restoration to happen, the victim needs to feel as though they have been justly compensated, and the perpetrator needs a way to show they have paid a satisfactory debt. And that's not a bad principle for any justice system. Second, we see that sin against another member of society is also sin against God. Restoration with the victim is not enough to restore a person into covenant community. Covenant community at its base is a community defined by covenant with Yahweh. So, restoration must be made with him as well. Paying back more than what was stolen restores human relationship. The reparation offering restores divine relationship.

For all the detail we get in the Bible, we do not get much description about actual worship experiences, about people putting this into practice, and what it felt like. So, here is an example, it is a much later example, but it is a biblical example, from the life of Hezekiah who brought about reforms after the reign of his pagan father Ahaz. Speaking to the priests in 2 Chronicles 29:10-11 Hezekiah says this,

¹⁰ Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His burning anger may turn away from us. ¹¹ My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burn incense.

Then we get description of a ritual Hezekiah had come up with for the cleansing of the temple after the idolatry of his father. Here we get sacrifice and music combined under the leadership of a king who truly sought after the heart of God. I'll read the whole passage. This is 2 Chronicles 29:20-29.

²⁰ Then King Hezekiah arose early and assembled the princes of the city and went up to the house of the LORD. ²¹ They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and Judah. And he ordered the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer *them* on the altar of the LORD. ²² So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. They also slaughtered the rams and sprinkled the blood on the altar; they slaughtered the lambs also and sprinkled the blood on the altar. ²³ Then they brought the male goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. ²⁴ The priests slaughtered them and purged the altar with their blood to atone for all Israel, for the king ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel. ²⁵ He then stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets. ²⁶ The Levites stood with the *musical* instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. ²⁷ Then Hezekiah gave the order to offer the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to the LORD also began with the trumpets, *accompanied* by the instruments of David, king of Israel. ²⁸ While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this *continued* until the burnt offering was finished. ²⁹ Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped.

That seems to me the ritual of the Law done right. The Levitical rituals were instituted to help Israelites fix their eyes on God, with the desire to covenant with him from the heart, that they would confess sin and be freed from the guilt of sin, that they would sing and worship and bow down.

God says to the Israelites in Leviticus 26:11–13, if you keep ways, I will bless you,

¹¹ Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. ¹² I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that *you* would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

How do our rituals and practices as New Covenant believers set us apart as holy, leading us to confess our sin, to let it go, sing, and worship, and bow down? And how do our rituals and practices help transform our thinking and our behavior? That's the challenge for us from Leviticus. Are we setting ourselves apart as holy and are our rituals and our practices helping us to do that? Though Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1-2 is grounded in the wonderful new covenant vision of Romans 1-11, the language seems to come right out of Leviticus. Let's close with this, Romans 12:1-2.

¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as you read Leviticus 1:1-9 and 6:1-11? What do you notice as interesting or important or strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. Consider just one of the required sacrifices, maybe the burnt offering in 1:1-9, and come up with at least three details not mentioned. If you planned to make this sacrifice, what are three questions not covered in the text that you would ask a priest to help you understand what you were expected to do?
3. What are some of the spiritual benefits that Israelites may have received through the experience of sacrifice?
4. What stands out to you as you read about the laws concerning the feasts in Leviticus 23?
5. Consider just one of the assigned feasts and come up with at least three details not mentioned. If you planned to celebrate this feast, what are three questions not covered in the text that you would ask to help you understand what you were expected to do?
6. What are some of the truths impressed on the Israelites through offering sacrifice and through the celebration of the feasts?
7. Which of the offerings in Leviticus do you think fits best with the idea of a living sacrifice in Romans 12:1? Do you think Paul was pointing towards any one sacrifice in particular?