

Burnt Offerings and Grain Offerings (Leviticus 1-2)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Introduction and Background

- a. In the prior lesson, we addressed the question, “Why should Christians study the **Book of Leviticus**?”
 - i. Many Christians find this book hard to understand, uninteresting, and/or not relevant to their lives. As a result, many Christians tend to avoid **Leviticus**.
 - ii. However, the Law of Moses (including passages from Leviticus) was used by the apostles to make some very practical and foundational points in their letters.
 1. This was the case even to letters addressed to primarily *Gentile* converts to the Christian faith. We looked at examples from **1 and 2 Peter**, and **1 and 2 Corinthians**.
 2. The apostles assumed that the Gentile Christians they were writing to knew the Law of Moses fairly well. So even though we are not bound by the Law of Moses, there are things contained in it that are very valuable to Christians.
 3. In referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul said that everything written in them was *for our learning* (**Romans 15:4**). That would include the *Law of Moses*.
 - iii. Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures he had learned from childhood (the Old Testament) were “able to make you wise for salvation”. Paul also said that these Scriptures were “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be *complete, thoroughly equipped* for every good work.” (**2 Timothy 3:15–17**, NKJV)
 - iv. Understanding **Leviticus** will help us to get more out of our reading the New Testament (the backdrop of the temple sacrifice system in the gospels; the book of Hebrews; many references and much imagery used by the apostles in their letters).
- b. A review of the timeline, when the book of **Leviticus** was written (as discussed in our prior series on **Exodus**):

- i. The Israelites took close to two months from the time they crossed the Red Sea until they reached Mt. Sinai. (**Exodus 19:1**)
- ii. They then spent about ten months encamped at Mt. Sinai (months three through twelve after they left Egypt), during which:
 1. Moses received the Ten Commandments and instructions regarding the tabernacle and priesthood,
 2. the priests were anointed,
 3. the tabernacle was constructed and dedicated,
 4. a census was taken (**Numbers 1:1**) before the people broke camp, and
 5. the other laws were given to Moses, including further instructions regarding sacrifices and priests (contained in **Leviticus**).
- iii. During the next six months, the Israelites proceeded to Kadesh Barnea, where the twelve spies are sent out.
- iv. The remainder of the forty years was spent wandering in the Wilderness. (The census through wanderings is covered in the book of **Numbers**.)
- v. Before Moses dies at Mount Nebo near the end of this forty-year period, he recounts the story to the Israelites and gives them final instructions (in **Deuteronomy**).

II. The “Weightier Matters” of the Law of Moses

- a. The Law of Moses has a lot of *negative* associations in the minds of many Christians, based on certain things Paul said regarding the Law. Typical things I hear regarding the Law include:
 - i. It was essentially impossible to follow.
 - ii. It was full of picky details and technicalities.
 - iii. The Law was given just to show us that we could not become righteous on our own.
 1. Many Protestants will set up a contrast between obedience to laws of God vs. being saved by *grace*.
 2. Then they incorrectly define ‘grace’ as ‘*unmerited* favor’, rather than defining it correctly as ‘favor’ (whether merited or unmerited).

- iv. Recently a Christian friend from another church was telling me that whenever he attempted reading through the entire Bible, he hit “the wall” at the beginning of **Leviticus**.
- b. However, let us start by considering what *Jesus* had to say regarding the Law of Moses.
 - i. Read **Matthew 23:13-24**. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for:
 - 1. Hypocrisy (not practicing what they preached),
 - 2. Greed,
 - 3. Making other disciples that were even worse than themselves, and
 - 4. Focusing on the smaller details of the Law of Moses but neglecting “the weightier matters: ...justice, mercy and *faith* [or *faithfulness*]”.
 - ii. When Jesus considered the Law of Moses, what did He observe?
 - 1. Not all the commands were of equal weight.
 - 2. The most important parts of it related to how we treat God and others (here: justice, mercy, and faithfulness).
 - iii. Read **Luke 10:25-28**.
 - 1. “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.’” (**Luke 10:25–28**, NKJV)
 - 2. **Question:** How did this lawyer know that? How did he figure out that those were the *most important* of all the commands? (Since there is no place where Moses tells us *specifically* which parts of the Law are most important.)
 - a. **Possible Answer:** Perhaps he discerned that from *meditating on* the Scriptures, not just casually reading them.
 - i. Consider what it says in **Psalm 1:1-3** about the blessings from “meditating day and night” on the

law of the Lord. This involves thinking deeply about what it says and considering what is *most important* in it.

- b. “But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* [Deuteronomy 6:5] This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* [Leviticus 19:18] On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:34–40, NKJV)
- c. When Jesus looked at the Law of Moses, He saw something good. He saw it was all built on love: loving God above anything and loving our neighbors as ourselves.
 - i. When Jesus looked at the **Book of Leviticus**, I believe He saw **Leviticus 19:18** (which addresses how we treat others) as towering above the sacrificial regulations contained in the first ten chapters of that book.
- d. From the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (Matthew 5:17, NKJV)
- c. Consider what Isaiah said about the sacrifices Israel was making in his day. Read **Isaiah 1:1-17** and **1:21-23**.
 - i. The Lord was disgusted with the sacrifices and offerings of the Israelites.
 1. He refers to them as “Sodom” and “Gomorrah”.
 2. Their burnt offerings, lambs, bulls, goats, etc. are worthless to the Lord.
 3. Their fine grain offerings and incense are offered in vain.
 4. All their religious observances, meetings, fastings and prayers are detestable to Him. The Lord says He *hates them*; they are an *abomination* to Him!

5. The problem: they are wicked people.
 - a. They are violent; their hands are full of blood.
 - b. They have ignored the widows and orphans.
 - c. They are more foolish than domestic animals like donkeys. The people do not know their Lord.
- ii. What we learn about God from this passage:
 1. He is not impressed with mechanical outward religious observances by wicked people. These people missed the purpose of the Law, the *most important* things: justice, mercy, loving your neighbor as yourself, etc.
 2. To Him, the way people behave toward one another is more important than the sacrifices they are offering. The sacrifices are only meaningful to the Lord if done by people who are seeking righteousness.
 3. We can see here what the Lord considers “the weightier matters of the Law” to be.
- d. **Question:** Now that Christ has come, are we Christians under *any* law?
 - i. Read **James 1:21-27**.
 1. James says we are now under “the *perfect law* of liberty”.
 2. He says that we need to do what this law tells us, and we must continue in it. For example:
 - a. If we don’t control our tongues, our religion is worthless.
 - b. We need to be looking out for the widows and orphans (loving our neighbors as ourselves).
 - c. We need to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world.
 - ii. Read **James 2:8-13**.
 1. He says we will be judged by this law of liberty.
 2. He points to **Leviticus 19:18** as “the royal law”.
 3. We need to speak and do according to this perfect law we are under.

4. We need to show mercy toward others if we are to escape the judgment.
- iii. In His conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:
1. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (**Matthew 7:21-23**, NKJV)
 - a. Those who reject the laws laid out by Jesus will be rejected by Him on the Day of Judgment. He will say to the lawless, “I *never* knew you.”
- iv. The great prophet who was promised to come in the future (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**) would be one who was “*like Moses*”. In his apologetic work, *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius made the point that in order to be “like Moses”, this prophet would have to meet the distinctive characteristic of Moses: bringing new laws from God.
1. Moses had said: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you asked from the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let us not hear again the voice of the Lord our God, nor let us see this great fire any more, lest we die.’ Then the LORD said to me, ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My word in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all I command Him. Therefore, whatever man will not listen to whatever the Prophet speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, LXX, OSB)
 2. Only Moses, among all the prophets, *brought new laws from God*.
 3. All the other prophets who followed him (up until Jesus) simply said, “Follow the Laws of Moses.” None of them (until Jesus) brought new laws.
 4. Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies regarding the anticipated:
 - a. The Son of God;
 - b. The High Priest who would offer the perfect sacrifice once for all time;

- c. The King who would reign over God's eternal kingdom;
and
- d. The Prophet who would be "like Moses".
 - i. In **Acts 3:20-23** Peter explains how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy of **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**.
 - ii. In **Acts 7:37**, Stephen also explains that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy given by Moses in **Deuteronomy 18**.
 - iii. I believe this prophecy of Moses regarding the prophet to come also is alluded to in the gospel of **John** in several places, including **John 1:21, 1:45, 5:46, 6:14** and **7:40**.
 - iv. Recall also that Jesus said, beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy *but to fulfill*." (**Matthew 5:17**, NKJV)
 - 1. Jesus came as the successor to Moses. He was a prophet "like Moses", who brought new laws: *the perfect law of liberty*.
 - 2. Jesus changed the laws handed down by Moses:
 - a. He loosened the dietary restrictions.
 - b. He changed the teachings of Moses regarding divorce and remarriage.
 - c. He established that God could be worshiped in all places, not just through the temple in Jerusalem.
 - d. He changed the laws of vengeance, calling us now to love our enemies.
 - e. Etc.
- e. Lessons for us Christians today.

- i. We are under a perfect law, one that is much better than the Law of Moses.
- ii. As with the Mosaic Law, some commandments of Christ under the new covenant are much *weightier* (more foundational, more important) than others.
- iii. Three dangers I see in the 'Christian world' today regarding "laws". (These are classic ways that Satan uses to get many Christians *off track*.)
 1. One group of Christians insists that there are *no longer any laws*.
 - a. They tend to see the commands of Jesus, such as those in the Sermon on the Mount, as *good suggestions*, or things we might want to do out of gratitude for what Jesus did for us. However, they do not see in His commands *any laws* that must be followed to inherit salvation.
 2. A second group of Christians creates and *binds even more laws* than the ones Jesus and the apostles gave us!
 - a. These are often found in the form of *written laws* and standards, man-made rules that are bound on the members of a congregation.
 - b. However, sometimes these are found in the form of *unwritten rules* that are understood by all, often with strong *peer pressure* exerted to bring about conformity.
 - c. **Reminder:** Jesus made it clear in **Matthew 15:1-9** that we have no business imposing man-made rules, whether written or otherwise, that go beyond the Scriptures.
 3. A third group of Christians wants to focus primarily on certain specific visible, measurable-type laws of Christ. They put *greatest emphasis* on the *less important* commands of Christ.
 - a. They tend to "major in the minors".
 - b. They often emphasize one or two (and often lesser) laws, the ones that their own group happens to be following already (and perhaps other Christian groups are ignoring or openly violating).

- c. Since these Christians are among the few that are following these select commands, these commands over time somehow become (in their minds) the *most important* commands of Christ. Therefore, those who follow these one or two commands sometimes conclude that they are *the most faithful* or even the *only true* Christians on earth!
- iv. **Questions:** What are the most important, “weightier” laws? And what are the lesser ones (which we should not neglect, either).
- 1. I encourage you to wrestle with that in your own study. Certainly, loving God, loving others as Jesus loved us (laying our lives down) and striving for unity among all Christians are all among the *most important* commands of Jesus.
 - a. Read **1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3**.
 - i. Paul explains that love is the most important commandment of God.
 - b. On the night before Jesus was crucified, he told the apostles:
 - i. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (**John 13:34–35**, NKJV)
 - ii. “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (**John 15:12–13**, NKJV)
 - iii. Jesus prayed, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; *that they all may be one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” (**John 17:20–23**, NKJV)

2. Certainly, the things highlighted “pure and undefiled religion” in **James 1:27** (showing a caring love for those who are in greatest need and keeping oneself from being contaminated by the world) are also among the most foundational laws of Christ.
- v. **Challenge:** Let us put our *greatest effort* into understanding and following *the most important commands* of Jesus. At the same time, let us not neglect the lesser ones, either.

III. The Burnt Offering

- a. Read **Leviticus 1:1-17**.
 - i. The burnt offering is the first of five sacrificial offerings discussed in **Leviticus 1-6**.
- b. Characteristics of the burnt offering include:
 - i. The entire animal was to be consumed by fire at the *bronze altar* (which sometimes is referred to as the ‘altar of the burnt offering’).
 - ii. The animal to be sacrificed must be a male without blemish (from among oxen, sheep, goats, or even doves and pigeons).
 1. Note that these are all *domestic animals* owned and maintained by people, as opposed to wild animals found in nature.
 2. The people individually bring these animals and kill/offer them themselves.
 - iii. The blood of the sacrificed animal was to be sprinkled around the door of the tabernacle.
 - iv. The priests are not to eat any of it (since all is burned up on the bronze altar).
 1. We will notice that for some of the other types of sacrifice, the priests are allotted a portion, which they are to eat.
- c. This particular offering is referred to in **Hebrews 10**.
 - i. Read **Hebrews 10:1-10**.
 1. The offering and blood of animals could not take away sins. However, these Old Testament animal offerings/sacrifices foreshadowed the perfect and effective sacrifice that would come through the body of Christ.

2. Here the **Hebrews** writer quotes from **Psalm 39:7-9** in the Septuagint (LXX). That corresponds to **Psalm 40:6-8** in Bibles, where the Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text (MT).
3. The point made by the Hebrews writer is that the phrase “a body you have prepared for me” (which is found in the LXX but not in the MT) speaks of the body of Jesus.
4. These sacrifices, according to the psalmist, would be replaced by the sacrifice of another, greater “body”.
5. The word “*burnt offering*”, here and in the LXX (in Greek), is the same word as “*holocaust*”, meaning the *entire body is burned up*.
 - a. This is the origin of the familiar term ‘*the Holocaust*’, which in the 20th century was applied to the murder of millions of Jews under Hitler.

IV. The Grain Offering

- a. Read **Leviticus 2:1-16**.
 - i. The ‘grain offering’ is sometimes referred to as the ‘cereal offering’.
 - ii. **Question:** Can you think of any discussions about this offering anywhere in the New Testament?
- b. Characteristics of the grain offering include:
 - i. This offering consists of fine flour, or grains, or else cooked as bread or a cake (baked in an oven or fried in a pan).
 - ii. It is to be offered with oil and frankincense on it.
 - iii. No leaven or honey is allowed with this offering.
 - iv. However, it must be *salted with salt*.
 - v. A portion of it is burned up on the altar.
 - vi. Another portion of this offering is reserved for the priests to eat.
- c. **Question:** Is this offering quoted or alluded to anywhere in the New Testament to teach something to Christians?
 - i. Paul alludes to this in his teaching to the Corinthians regarding material support for those who preach the gospel full-time. Read **1 Corinthians 9:1-14**.

1. Paul says the Lord commanded that “those who preach the gospel should make their living from the gospel”.
 2. He points to the examples of farmers and herdsmen, who can partake of the fruit and flock.
 3. He also points to the Law of Moses (**Deuteronomy 25:4**) “do not muzzle the ox...”
 4. He also points back to the priests of the temple, who were allowed *to eat of the offerings of the altar* (including the grain offering).
- ii. In the same letter, Paul also refers to this in explaining why Christians must not eat at the shrines of idols. He connects this command with the Lord’s Supper. Read **1 Corinthians 10:14-22**.
1. Paul points to the example of the priests who ate from the sacrifices at the altar.
 2. The implication is that we, as members of a “royal priesthood” (consider **1 Peter 2**, **Romans 12:1**, etc.), are partaking (in the bread and wine, participating in the body and blood of Christ) in a spiritual altar, eating of the sacrifice.
 3. Likewise, he reasons, we who (as members of the new priesthood) eat from the Lord’s altar cannot also eat from the altar of demons.
- iii. There may be a similar reference near the end of **Hebrews**. Read **Hebrews 13:9-10**.
1. “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.” (**Hebrews 13:9-10**, NKJV)
 2. The point: we Christians are eating from *an even greater altar* than the one that the Old Testament priests ate from.
- d. No *leaven* (*yeast*) was allowed in the grain offering.
- i. **Question:** Does this *prohibition* foreshadow anything?
 - ii. There are multiple references to leaven as being a type or foreshadowing of *sin* in the New Testament (**Matthew 16:6-12**, **Mark 8:15**, **Luke 12:1**, **Galatians 5:9** and **1 Corinthians 5**).

1. Note also the prohibition of adding honey. Often, in bread-making, sugar or honey is added to aid in the leavening process.
- e. The grain offering *must* include *salt*.
- i. **Question:** Does this *requirement* foreshadow anything?
 - ii. Consider also what Jesus said in **Mark 9:42-50** regarding “salt”, especially in the Majority Text (look at KJV and NKJV).
 1. “For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” (**Mark 9:49-50**, NKJV)
 - iii. **Question:** What is the significance (or distinctive purpose alluded to), of salt?
 1. It is widely used to add flavor to otherwise bland food.
 2. It is valuable; used in connection with making covenants.
 3. It was commonly used as a preservative for food, especially in an age where refrigeration was difficult or impossible. It tends to prevent decay.
 4. Also, salt stings when poured on a wound (for disinfecting use).
 - iv. Early Christian writer Methodius, bishop of the church in Lycia (d. c. 311 AD) commented on the significance of salt in the Scriptures:
 1. “For it must needs be that the soul which is not sprinkled with the words of Christ, as with salt, should stink and breed worms, as King David, openly confessing with tears in the mountains, cried out, ‘My wounds stink and are corrupt,’ (**Psalm 37:6**, LXX; **38:5**, MT) because he had not salted himself with the exercises of self-control, and so subdued his carnal appetites, but self-indulgently had yielded to them, and became corrupted in adultery.
 2. “And hence, in **Leviticus** every gift, unless it be seasoned with salt, is forbidden to be offered as an oblation to the Lord God. Now the whole spiritual meditation of the Scriptures is given to us as salt which stings in order to benefit, and which disinfects, without which it is impossible for a soul, by means of reason, to

be brought to the Almighty; for 'you are the salt of the earth,' **(Matthew 5:13)** said the Lord to the apostles."

- a. (Source: Methodius, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, discourse 1, chapter 1; *found in Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 6, p. 311)
- v. How most bread is made.
1. In the process of baking bread, one of the first steps is to add honey or sugar, to *activate the yeast*.
 2. However, in making the special bread or grain offering that was to be offered to the Lord, He specified no yeast and no honey. It appears that God does not want the yeast/sin to be activated!
 3. **Question/Challenge:** Would you rather be 'the *honey* of the earth', or 'the *salt* of the earth'?
 - a. Many Christians want to bring a positive message that will be popular to the world around them, one that does not disturb others.
 - b. To me, that is like being "the *honey* of the earth".
 - c. However, Jesus calls us to be the preservative of this world, which will save this lost world from death, decay and destruction. This will sting for some: preaching repentance from sin and calling everyone to a life of *self-control*.
 - i. Only by being *the salt of the earth* will we be able to save many others in the end.
 - ii. When presenting the sacrifice, do not forget to be (and apply) *the salt*!