

# COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

*Vayikra*

He called

**“A Witness Who Keeps Silent”**

Leviticus 1:1-5:26[6:7]

Isaiah 43:21-44:23

As we begin to examine the Book of Leviticus, the Torah student gets an opportunity to study the sacrificial system that was instituted by the Lord to cover the transgressions of His people. In Exodus, the Ancient Israelites have just completed the construction of the Tabernacle, and have witnessed God’s glory descend upon it. The weight (Heb. *kavod*) of His presence was so intense that Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting in order to communicate directly with the Almighty (Exodus 40:34-35).

There is little doubt that at the close of the Book of Exodus, Moses’ credibility and reputation with the people of Israel was at its pinnacle. Moses’ revealed God’s instructions on how to build the Tabernacle and all of its accoutrements, and they were followed to precision. The result had to be an awesome sight to these former Egyptian slaves, who were privileged to participate in the construction projects. From a distance they were all eyewitnesses to the pillars of fire and cloud that were guiding them by night and day, but now the manifestation of God’s presence was preventing access to the awesome structure.

It is at this point that the Torah prescribes the sacrificial system that Moses was given directly from God in the Tent of Meeting. Without any significant interruption in the text, it appears that the Lord, from His new location in the midst of Israel, began to address the need for the individual atonement of the sins of the people:

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“Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ‘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.” 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. 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.” 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” (Leviticus 1:1-4).

In these opening verses of Leviticus, we discover that the sacrifices for transgressions are intended to be quite personal. The one who is guilty of sin is instructed to place his hands on the head of the animal that has been chosen from the herd, onto which the sin guilt will be transferred. The individual is told that “He is to slaughter the young bull before the LORD” (Leviticus 1:5, NIV), and then Aaron and his sons are to take the blood and offer and sprinkle it in the appropriate places. Can you imagine the impact this ceremony would have on you if you were required to participate in this ritual? If you have ever slaughtered an animal—which the great majority of modern-day people have never done—you might have some understanding of the significance of what was mandatory. But can you visualize actually placing your hands on an innocent animal's head with the knowledge that your sin has required a blood atonement, in order for you to be restored to a right relationship with God? From an economic standpoint, what would happen if you had to slaughter your prize bull in order to affect a degree of reconciliation with the Creator?

Many of these thoughts are difficult to fathom, but as you read through the Book of Leviticus, the variety of offerings and their significance for the array of sins of commission and sins of omission, can be a bit overwhelming. It is understandable that many, especially in the nearly two thousand years since the Second Temple was destroyed in Jerusalem, have had a tendency to not really comprehend what is being communicated in passages such as these. Since Yeshua's atoning work for sinful humanity at Golgotha (Calvary), the propensity for His followers to focus on *His permanent sacrifice* has understandably outweighed the study of the Book of Leviticus in most Christian teaching. As a result, the ability, to personalize the gravity of sin and what was required to restore a right relationship with God, has been largely mitigated. Many Believers simply claim the “blood of Yeshua” when they transgress the Father's will—if they are even aware of what it is—at too many times resulting in very little, if any, spiritual growth toward maturity. While none of us should *ever* be found degrading or downplaying the eternal salvation available in the Son of God (cf. Hebrews 10:29), **how can we appreciate such salvation if we do not first appreciate the sacrificial system of Leviticus?**

This is one of the primary reasons that the Lord today has convicted many Believers to return to a consistent study of the Torah. By actually reading through this Torah portion, *Vayikra*, and meditating upon some or all of the sins which require atonement, one should be able to analyze areas of his or her life where some “fine tuning” would be appropriate. Who among us is *not* personally guilty of various sins of commission or omission at times? Even if we have experienced the transformative power of the good news, having received the Lord Yeshua into our hearts—are there not areas of our lives which need (significant) improvement? How frequently do we fail to really consider the gravity of the words of 1 John 1:8-10?

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10).

I trust that many of you reading this commentary have taken care of *the bulk* of the sinful habits and behaviors that might have once been present in your life. But, among those areas that you know do need to change, have you been completely honest with yourself? Does sin truly have *no influence at all* over you?

Interestingly, I have seen 1 John 1:8-10 described in the past as a “Christian confessional bar of soap,” as God is able to forgive us and cleanse us of all our sin and guilt if we ask Him. Our sin nature inherited in Adam, can still at times have a tendency to negatively influence us, our decisions, our thoughts and demeanor, and how we conduct ourselves in the workplace and in family life. The Apostle John describes some of the significant benefits of a true salvation experience, as we are to have each become redeemed children of God **who are experiencing victory over sin and lawlessness:**

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:1-10).

Here, we see that John clarifies the concept of sin and the fact that when we are *in Him and abiding in Him* we do not sin. But the problem is that in our spiritual journey, the sanctification process takes time, and a knowledge of just what sin is—and what righteousness is—is mandatory in order for us to mature. Take this one example from *Vayikra* as a starter in your personal appraisal:

**“Now if a person sins after he hears a public adjuration to testify when he is a witness, whether he has seen or otherwise known, if he does not tell it, then he will bear his guilt”** (Leviticus 5:1).

Have you ever been in a predicament when you were a primary eyewitness to some sinful circumstances that were being investigated or adjudicated by some authority? This could be a civil or criminal offense from a minor misdemeanor to a felony. Perhaps you did not want to be involved in the investigation or prosecution, because of your relationship to the offender. Or perhaps you were concerned about your potential loss of time. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, you might have justified your decision to act ignorant to the circumstances. *By doing so, did you know that you were not only disobeying secular law, but also God’s Law?*

Perhaps by thinking and meditating on many of the different implications from this single commandment, you can hopefully become a better corporate citizen to the community where you live. If you do not come forward, then the Torah of Moses says that you will bear the guilt of the offender! I urge you to consider this, and recall some instances in your life when you should have stood up to say something.

What if you are an employee at a company and you witness some people stealing some of the company pens and paper for their own personal use? What if the owner of the company asks all the employees to report any known offenders? Are you going to come to the employer and report what you have witnessed? Or are you going to remain silent and bear the guilt of the offender? At least consider the possibility that if you do not come forward and say something, that all employees could be penalized if the situation remains unresolved. *Do you really want to lose pay, vacation time, or be laid off because of someone else’s transgression?*

On a spiritual level when we witness our brothers or sisters in sin, there is an admonition that allows us to deal with them in love. In his final statement in his epistle, James gives us a strong encouragement to go to fellow members of the faith community, in order to save them:

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

This is a strong parallel passage that echoes the words of Yeshua, when He was instructing His Disciples about how to deal with issues of sin in the community:

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE

CONFIRMED [Deuteronomy 19:15]. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly; and if he refuses to listen even to the assembly, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).

The problem we face on all of these levels throughout the world is that most people do not know the ramifications of a Torah commandment like Leviticus 5:1. If we understood the guilt of our lack of performance to testify, when we have personal knowledge of some offense, then perhaps we would follow the instructions. In so doing, our culture may improve as offenders are duly prosecuted. Companies would avoid the loss of assets from internal theft. Our assemblies and congregations would function more righteously as the “sin in the camp” is properly handled. Most importantly, those who refuse to confront flagrant sin that they have personal knowledge about, would not be burdened with the guilt that should rest upon the offender, rather than the one who keeps silent.

If you take the time to reflect upon all of the different offerings in this portion, I am confident that you will be able to identify with some of the different sins of commission or omission, and perhaps let the indwelling Spirit convict you of where you need to confess, repent, and be restored to His grace. The following is an appropriate summary I would ask you to reflect upon before our Heavenly Father:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD’s holy things, then he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD: a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, in *terms of* the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. He shall make restitution for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, and shall add to it a fifth part of it and give it to the priest. The priest shall then make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and it will be forgiven him. Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment. He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know *it*, and it will be forgiven him. It is a guilt offering; he was certainly guilty before the LORD” (Leviticus 5:14-19).

Comprehending the sacrificial system of Leviticus more fully is a blessing to those who take the time to meditate on the ramifications of intentional or unintentional disobedience. By doing so, it gives the revelatory power of the indwelling Spirit the opportunity to expose areas of your life which need to be dealt with through confession and repentance. As a result, those who are seeking the truth, while being led and taught by the Holy Spirit, have an opportunity to develop a deeper and more profound walk with the Lord as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:11-13). And, unlike the Ancient Israelites who would have to offer various animal sacrifices over and over again—we can walk in the assurance that with the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah and His

permanent sacrifice—that an everlasting solution to the guilt incurred by sin is available to all those who place their trust in Him!

## Tzav

### Give an order

## “Kindness, Justice, Righteousness”

Leviticus 6:1[8]–8:36  
Jeremiah 7:21–8:3; 9:22–23

While reading about the different offerings instructed, and the variety of sacrificial procedures in this week’s Torah portion, you can easily see how God was very specific about the guilt offering,<sup>1</sup> burnt offering,<sup>2</sup> grain offering,<sup>3</sup> sin offering,<sup>4</sup> and peace offering.<sup>5</sup> After detailing these specific offerings and their associated procedures, Leviticus ch. 8 describes how Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated as priests before the Lord. For the first time in the history of Israel, the high priest and the attendant priests are set-apart for service unto God and the people. Our *parashah* closes with a final word that seems to punctuate this selection of teaching in Leviticus chs. 6-8:

**“Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD had commanded through Moses”** (Leviticus 8:36).

For centuries, Ancient Israel attempted to follow these instructions with varying degrees of zeal and accuracy. The Tabernacle migrated throughout the wilderness, into the Promised Land to the period of the Judges and onto Shiloh, to ultimately be placed on Mount Moriah, when a magnificent Temple by the direction of King Solomon would finally be constructed. Thereafter, Israel had a more permanent place to bring their respective offerings. But apparently by the time of the Prophet Jeremiah, the intentions of the offerings had digressed to various perversions that were rampant among the people. If you take the time to read the context of our coupled Haftarah reading (Jeremiah 7:21-8:3; 9:22-24), you should be appalled by the declension to idolatry, theft, murder, adultery, and even child sacrifice. Jeremiah even prophesied that the Temple will end up like Shiloh and that the Southern Kingdom of Judah will be scattered just like the Northern Kingdom exiles had been two centuries earlier:

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 6:1-7; 7:1-10.

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 6:8-13.

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 6:14-23.

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 6:24-30.

<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 7:11-20.