

We saw last time that Leviticus takes place at Mt. Sinai
in the first month of the second year since they came out of the land of Egypt.

In Exodus 40, Moses had set up the tabernacle and consecrated it.
The Tabernacle is the first place on earth – since the Garden –
where God promises to meet with man.

But Exodus ends with a problem.

Look back over to Exodus 40:34 –

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting,
and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

That sounds great!

God has come to dwell with man!

But if the purpose of the Tabernacle is that God may dwell with man –
then verse 35 raises a question mark:

“And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting
because the cloud settled on it,
and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

God has come to dwell with man –

but man – even Moses! – may not enter.

Who shall ascend the mountain of the LORD?

Who can enter into the Holy of Holies?

Who can dwell with God?

So – it is in *that* context – on that *same day* – as far as we can tell,
that the LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

Hey Moses – You can’t come in right now –
but let me tell you how you can!

I want you to be able to draw near.

But we need to deal with that whole sin and rebellion thing!

Leviticus begins with Israel – God’s firstborn Son –
standing outside the cherubim-guarded entry to Eden (the Holy of Holies).

1. The Burnt “Ascension” Offering (Lev. 1)

And now, “the God who dwells within begins to speak,

revealing the way of entry, the way back to the tree of life.

To understand Leviticus, then, is to understand the way of YHWH,
the path of life.” (Morales, 111)

How can you draw near to God?

This is what chapters 1-10 will answer.

You need offerings (chapters 1-7).

And you need priests (chapters 8-10).

- 1:3 The burnt offering – or “ascension offering” –
was the foundation of the whole sacrificial system.
It is called the “ascension” offering because the whole animal is burnt –
and thus, the whole animal “ascends” up to God in smoke.

The word translated “offering” is *qorban* – which means “to draw near.”
So a burnt offering is quite literally, an ascent – drawing near to God!

When you offer a burnt offering – you are symbolically drawing near the deity.
You are saying, in effect, we are here to worship you –
we are here to draw near to you.

This is why the Israelite must bring a male without blemish for the burnt offering.
God was demonstrating that the perfect sacrifice must be an unblemished male.
God is looking for a holy son who will be blameless and pure.
(cf. Heb 9:14 and 1 Peter 1:19)

- 1:4 The worshiper must “lay his hand on the head” of the burnt offering,
(This is more than just a touch, implies a leaning, or entrusting)
cf. Numb 8:10, 12; 27:18, 23; Dt 34:9
What does the animal do on behalf of the worshiper?

Ascend in the smoke into God’s presence.
There is truly an “atonement” (at-one-ment) made here.

There can be no atonement without blood – without death.
Israel is not merely delivered *from* death –
but *through* death.
“dying to the old life-in-Egypt in the process
and in preparation for life-with-God in the land of Canaan.” (Morales, 129)

The blood represents the ‘soul’ or life of the worshiper.
Remember – the laying on of hands
meant that the worshiper identified with the animal –
so that the death of the animal became his own –
and the ascension of the animal became his own...

God and man are dwelling together through the blood of the sacrifice.
The burnt offering clearly includes an acknowledgement of sin.
Sin separates us from God.
And the only way for man to return to God is through death.

In the Ascension offering,
the Israelite acknowledges that he is not able
“to ascend God’s holy mountain himself,
and so he must “ascend through his blameless substitute.”

Israel must learn that it is only through blood sacrifice that atonement can be made.

But blood is not required for all offerings.

2. The Grain “Tribute” Offering (Lev. 2)

“When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it ² and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ³ But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings.

2:1-3 refers to a grain offering of flour mixed with oil and incense.

Grain offerings accompanied burnt offerings in the daily sacrifices (Numb 28:3-8)
and at the feast days (Lev. 23:12-13), ordinations, thanksgivings, etc.

We often focus so much on the bloody sacrifices that we forget about the grain offering.

What was the point of the grain offering?

Unlike the burnt offering, the grain offering has two participants:
part was burnt and part was eaten by Aaron and his sons.

It is referred to as “a most holy part of the LORD’s food offerings.” (verse 3)

There is a movement in the sacrifices,
from God alone partaking in the burnt offering,
to God and the priests partaking of the grain offering,
and then God, the priest, and the worshiper in the peace offering.

You could say that this offering was designed to keep the priests fed.

Or you could say it more accurately and say that this offering
was designed to remind the Israelites of their need
for a mediator who could bring peace with God.

This is why the grain offering is actually called a *minha* –
a “tribute offering”.

The term “minha” means a present or a donation –
but it was used euphemistically to refer to the tribute that people would bring
to their overlord.

Here, my lord, we bring you our present!
(Never mind that you ordered us to do it –
and your soldiers would kill us if we didn’t!)
but please accept it as our gift!

The tribute offering is where God’s people acknowledge that God alone is their God.
And so they bring a *minha* – a present.

The purpose of this tribute is so that the priests might have sufficient bread.
The first part of the tribute is mixed with oil and frankincense
and burned in the fire (on top of the burnt offering),
as a “food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD”
(notice that burning an offering in fire on the altar
is what connects the ascension offering with the tribute offering –
both are said to be a “food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD”)

Again – the purpose of these offerings is to connect God and man.
The rest of the tribute is given to the priests –
which introduces the importance of the priests as mediators,
connecting God and man.

In verses 1-3 the grain is simply ground into flour.

⁴ “When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil or unleavened wafers smeared with oil. ⁵ And if your offering is a grain offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mixed with oil. ⁶ You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. ⁷ And if your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. ⁸ And you shall bring the grain offering that is made of these things to the LORD, and when it is presented to the priest, he shall bring it to the altar. ⁹ And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ¹⁰ But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings. ¹¹ “No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the LORD.

Verses 4-13 explain that cooked grain was also acceptable,
so long as it remained unleavened.
Honey was also forbidden (and the term “honey” also includes other fruit sweeteners).

Why forbid leaven or sweeteners?

The text does not say –

but v12 makes it clear that the point has to do with what is *burned* on the altar,
not what is given to the priests.

¹² As an offering of firstfruits you may bring them to the LORD, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing aroma.

What is offered on the altar must be unleavened and unsweetened.

Remember that the burned portion of the flour tribute
was to be mixed with oil – and frankincense.

Unfortunately, there really is nothing in scripture that makes clear why this is.

Some have tried to say that leaven was viewed as *bad* –
but v12 makes it clear that leavened bread
could be brought to the LORD as firstfruits.

It would best to see this as a reminder of the Passover –

a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt,
when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt.
Therefore – burn unleavened bread on the altar.

But all grain offerings must be seasoned with salt

Indeed, verse 13 gives a very strong warning:

¹³ You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

The “salt of the covenant” refers to the fellowship between the people and the priests.

In Numbers 18:19 the priests are told that they have no inheritance in the land,
but that the sacrifices will be their food:

*All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the LORD I give to you,
and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due.
It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your offspring with you.*

Why is it called a “covenant of salt”?

Salt was an important part of table fellowship.

To eat salt together was a sign of friendship,
and so a “covenant of salt” speaks of a covenant between Israel and their priests
that the priests would mediate the blessings of redemption,
even as the people would provide food for the priests.

Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 9 that just as the priests made their living from the sacrifices,
so also the ministers in the new covenant
should make their living from preaching the gospel.

Thank you for taking this duty so seriously over the years.

Verses 14-16 then explain how to bring a grain offering as a part of the firstfruits.

¹⁴ “If you offer a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits fresh ears, roasted with fire, crushed new grain. ¹⁵ And you shall put oil on it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. ¹⁶ And the priest shall burn as its memorial portion some of the crushed grain and some of the oil with all of its frankincense; it is a food offering to the LORD.

Since the land belongs to the LORD, this was a sort of rent.

Even as a tenant would bring the landowner the firstfruits of the harvest,
so Israel must bring the firstfruits of the harvest to God,
sharing in the goodness of the harvest with the priests and Levites.

The first portion – again – was burned in the fire (with oil and frankincense)
as a “tribute offering” –
but the rest would go to the priest.
(and as v12 points out, the portion for the priest could have leaven and sweeteners).

By the way –
this is part of the reason why we use leavened bread in the Lord’s Supper.

It’s true that Jesus would have used unleavened bread at the Last Supper.
But the Last Supper is not the same thing as the Lord’s Supper
(otherwise we need to have lamb and bitter herbs!).

The Lord’s Supper was instituted at a Passover feast,
but the Lord’s Supper joins together the fulfillment of *all* the feasts!
Paul makes that clear in 1 Corinthians 10,
when he speaks of how the worshipers partake of the altar
by partaking of the sacrifice.

When Jesus gathered with his disciples eight days after the resurrection and broke bread,
what sort of bread would he have used?
Since the feast of Passover was over,
ordinary leavened bread would have been the only bread available.

Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed.
He is the one who was offered as the ascension offering –
as the portion that ascended by death –
a sweet aroma to the LORD.

We are a holy priesthood in Christ –

and leaven and sweeteners are appropriate for the portion of the priests.

3. The Peace Offering (Lev. 3)

³ “If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. ² And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. ³ And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the LORD, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, ⁴ and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. ⁵ Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

⁶ “If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. ⁷ If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, ⁸ lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. ⁹ Then from the sacrifice of the peace offering he shall offer as a food offering to the LORD its fat; he shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails ¹⁰ and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. ¹¹ And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the LORD.

Chapter 3 then deals with the *peace offering* –

and for once, I will not quibble with the translation –
because *shalom* is very well translated “peace”!

The first part of the peace offering sounds like a burnt offering.

Indeed, the fat, the liver, and the kidneys are burned on top of the ascension offering –
and together with the ascension and tribute offerings,
the peace offering is also called
“a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.”

At this point, we are not told what is done with the rest of the meat!

We will hear more about this later on chapter 7 –
but it is important to say here
that the priest partakes of part of the peace offering,
and the worshipers partake of the rest.

Yahweh here is portrayed as a host who gives his people a portion of the animal.

The people may partake of the peace offering,
because sin has been atoned for,
the way has been opened to fellowship with God.

Since, then, we have been justified by faith,

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).

In contrast to the burnt offering, either a male or a female animal could be used.

This is significant – because for the burnt offering,
it must be a male animal.

The death of the animal and the sprinkling of the blood
here expresses communion through the lifeblood of the animal.
The peace offering reflects the closeness of the bond (the covenant)
between God and his people.

There are strong connections with the ritual for the burnt offering
(with which it was always connected),
which demonstrates that table fellowship – communion –
always follows atonement.

¹² “If his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD ¹³ and lay his hand on its head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. ¹⁴ Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the LORD, the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails ¹⁵ and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. ¹⁶ And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma.

In verses 12-16a there is an additional reference to the goat,
which may refer to the female goat (the word can mean female goat or both).

All fat is the LORD's. ¹⁷ It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

Finally, in 3:16b-17 we are told that all the fat belongs to Yahweh.
Israel was forbidden to eat fat or blood.

The eating of blood was forbidden back in Genesis – after the flood –
when God tells Noah that the life is in the blood.

This prohibition is strengthened in the Law of Moses –
and also confirmed in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council.

The apostles make it clear in Acts 15 that the Law of Moses is *not* imposed
(so they do not include “fat” in their decree) –
but they do think that the Noahic prohibition against eating blood
remains in effect.

The point is *not* that every drop of blood must be drained

The point is that we should avoid eating blood –
because the blood is the *life* of the animal.

In fact, this is what makes the Lord's Supper so *vital* –
so life-giving!
Because at the Lord's Table, we partake of the body and *blood* of our Lord Jesus!

(of course, we do so in a most *unbloody* way!)

But what about the fat?

This is not a reference to the fat that comes with the meat,
but to the internal fat—the fat connected to the entrails, kidney, liver, etc.
These were to be devoted to God in the fire.

And even “in all your habitations” Israel was not supposed to eat those parts
that were set apart for God.

God is beginning to teach his people about the *holy*.
There are certain things that belong to God.
Don't mess with that!

Some people think that the fat, the liver, and the kidneys were “delicacies.”

I'm not so sure.

Others point out that the kidneys in the OT refers to the center of the emotions.
They suggest that the devotion of these inner parts to God
is designed to remind the worshiper
that our inner parts belong to him as well.

That could be.

But the really important thing
is that God himself partakes of part of the animal –
the priest partakes of part –
and the worshiper partakes of part.

We have peace with God.
We now are sharing a meal with God!

Remember that when we went through the book of Exodus,
we saw that God went camping with his people.
They live in tents – so he had them build a big tent for him!

They cook on camp stoves – so he had them build a big camp stove for him!

And so now, we see that there is a way for man to have peace with God –
through the sacrifices.

And of course, for us,

Jesus Christ is our burnt offering –
the ascension offering who ascends to God through his substitutionary death,

He is our grain offering – the tribute offering,
the true bread from heaven that provides spiritual nourishment for his priests.

And he is our peace offering,
the covenant meal:
unless we eat of his flesh and drink of his blood,
we have no life in us.

Let us pray.