

## The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

*The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy* Have you ever wondered what the scriptures teach about the origin of the universe? What about the patriarchs, who were they, and why are they important? What relevance does the account of the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt have for Christian growth? What can the seemingly tedious ceremonial laws of Leviticus as well as the long list of names in Numbers teach us about godly living? How should a believer read and reflect on the five books of Moses collectively called the Pentateuch (or Torah)? How do these five books “fit in” to the over-arching story of scripture? These questions and more will be explored as we seek to understand this section of God’s Word.

The objective of this class is: to gain an overview of the first five books of the Bible (otherwise known as the Pentateuch), and understand the relation between these foundational books to Christ and Christian living.

The Ceremonies of Redemption: During the previous lesson we explored the newly ransomed people becoming a people of the Presence as God made known his desire to dwell among them and be their God. This week is the supernatural response to such a desire. After all, if God is your next door neighbor the pressing question should be, what is expected of me? The answer to this question is the book of Leviticus. Exodus offers the historical narrative of God redeeming his people from Egyptian slavery as well as the covenantal elements of the Mosaic Law. This is followed by the promise that God will dwell among Israel in a manner previously unheard of since the fall of man. God had specific instructions for his people prohibiting them from coming atop or even touching the mountain upon which he appeared and revealed his law to Moses. This same God recently wrought havoc on the Egyptian dynasty through the ten plagues. He faithfully honored his covenantal promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob centuries before, and miraculously parted the Red Sea so that Israel could pass on dry land. How could such a holy, all-powerful God dwell among an unholy and sinful people? To answer this question, we must read and understand the book of Leviticus. For the contemporary people of God, failure to understand the major concepts within the book of Leviticus, will result in failure to understand the extent of Christ’s atoning work on the cross.

Point One: *The Big Picture of Leviticus* – before we begin looking specifically at Leviticus 1-7 it will be helpful for us to take a step back and examine the “big picture” of the book. According to such Bible scholars as T. Desmond Alexander and Dr. Jay Skylar<sup>1</sup> The overarching motif of the book of Leviticus is a spectrum leading from uncleanness to cleanness and on to holiness with uncleanness and holiness being polar ends of the spectrum. Another way of understanding the book is to see the tension between the holiness of God (and God’s commands for his people to be holy as he is holy, i.e. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26) and the sinfulness or uncleanness of man. At the heart of this spiritual accommodation in which the people of the covenant learn what it means to live in a manner worthy of their calling, is law and ritual. It is to these rituals that we now look seeking to ask the following three questions: 1) what did the ancient ritual entail; 2) what role did the ritual play for ancient Israel; 3) what do the ancient rituals teach us about the law-giver?

One final comment should be made before we proceed to the next section and take a close look at the various offerings and rituals of ancient Israel. The totality of the law of God including the moral law, civil

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<sup>1</sup> Authors of, *From paradise to the Promised Land*, and the *Tyndale OT Commentary on Leviticus* respectively. Skylar is also a PCA teaching elder and professor of OT at Covenant Theological Seminary.

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law and ceremonial law, is necessary and helpful for study and consideration by the church because all the laws of God are a reflection of the values of the law-giver. Without an in-depth understanding of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement defined first in the book of Leviticus, the final offering of Christ makes little sense.

Point Two: *The Five Sacrifices of God's People* – In the first five chapters of the book of Leviticus the elements of the various types of sacrifices expected of ancient Israel are identified and described. Each sacrifice is mentioned, defined and briefly discussed below.

- A. *The Burnt Offering:* The burnt offering was a sacramental means by which the people of God could both worship as well as repent. Although different from the sin offering, there is a sense in which the burnt offering made atonement since the blood of the offering was thrown against the side of the altar. In the text, there are three different options allowed for the offering of a burnt offering. The first is the offering of a bull – a male cow. Bulls were extremely valuable in the ancient near east, and there were fewer of them than their female counterparts. The second option was a sheep from the flocks. The offering had to be a male without blemish. The third option is that of birds either turtle doves or young pigeons. The three options are listed in a descending order of costliness in the text, but all three options would have been costly, though in varying degrees, for the worshipper. It is interesting to note that nowhere in scripture is an offering truly and offering if it costs nothing (2 Samuel 24:24).

Three points should be made regarding the burnt offering before moving on. First, the offeror was required to come to the entrance of the tent of meeting to make an offering before the Lord. This required leaving one's own tent and coming to the place set apart for worship where God's presence dwelt. Second, he/she was required to place their hands on the head of the animal, signifying their identification with the offering. In essence, the worshipper was saying that the benefit of the sacrifice (the death of the animal) would be attributed to the worshipper. Thirdly, the animal had to be male and be without blemish. The gender of the animal was possibly important because the male of the live-stock was far more valuable than the female. The term, "without blemish" is the Hebrew word, *tamim* and means to be perfect or unimpaired. The gender of the animal was not enough to make it acceptable, it had to be perfect, without flaws. For this reason animals that were malnourished or had some form of deformity were forbidden as sacrifices.

- B. *The Grain Offering:* The grain offering was an offering, "...with a pleasing aroma before the Lord". The worshipper was given the option of presenting it to the priest either raw or cooked. If cooked he/she could bake it in the oven, on the griddle or fry it in the pan. Regardless of the means of cooking the offering (or if the offering were presented raw), the basic ingredients had to be the same: fine flour, oil, frankincense and salt. Unlike the burnt offering, which had to be fully burnt, a portion of the grain offering was removed by the priest and consumed by the priest and his family within the premise of the tabernacle.
- C. *The Peace Offering:* The peace offering is very similar to the burnt offering in the manner in which it was to be killed and the blood applied to the altar. However, similar to the grain offering, a portion of the peace offering was set aside to be consumed by the priest. The worshipper was required to place his hands on the head of the animal in much the same

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manner previously described denoting identification with the animal. The major difference between the peace offering and the burnt offering was that either a male or female from the herd, flock or from among the goats could be used. The instructions for the peace offering is concluded with the interesting command to eat neither fat nor blood (4:17).

- D. *The Sin Offering*: It is interesting to note that the only type of sin offering that is mentioned in scripture is an offering for unintentional sins. This does not mean that God's people would not sin knowingly (as did David with Bathsheba for instance), but rather that the terms of the covenant takes for granted that God's people for whom the sacrificial system was effectual, would strive to live in such a way that sin would be undesirable and all sin would consequently be unintentional (albeit inevitable because of the fallen nature of man). The sin offering was a provisional means of ransom in the biblical sense of the word. Today when we think of a ransom, we think of a kidnapping event or something similar in which an offender captures someone and demands the victim pay a price for their release. In this case, the offender is rewarded and the victim is penalized. The O.T. understanding of a ransom is demonstrated in the account of the goring ox mentioned in Exodus 21:28-32. This account demonstrates that if the owner of an ox that has been known to gore allows his ox to roam so that he kills a man or woman, the man is liable because he knew of the beast's tendency to gore. The ox should be stoned as well as the owner of the ox. However, there is a provision in which the living relative of the victim can place a ransom on the owner of the ox, a price that he/she will determine. If the owner pays the ransom, his life will be spared. In this case, the offended party has the right to demand restitution or ransom from the offender. This biblical definition of a ransom is essential for understanding both the nuances of the required sin offering as well as the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

The sin offering is God's way, being the victim or offended party, of placing a ransom on the life of man. He does so by requiring the O.T. covenant people to offer a sin offering; however, we know from Hebrews 10:4 that, "*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*". We see here a beautiful proclamation of the gospel. God the offended party has every right due to the nature of the offence to let us die. Instead, he places a ransom on his elect, a ransom that we cannot pay. He then does the preposterous: he provides payment for that ransom in his Son, Jesus Christ. Instead of seeing the laws governing the sin offering as pointless ceremonial rituals, we should see that they are a pure, O.T. demonstration of God's grace.

There were four categories of sin offerings: 1) the offering for the sins of a priest; 2) the offering for an unintentional sin of the congregation; 3) the offering for the sins of an elder or leader of the people; 4) the offering for the sins committed by the common folk. In the first two instances a male cow (bull) without blemish is required. The third scenario required a male goat, and the fourth scenario required a female goat without blemish. It is interesting to observe that the higher the level of one's responsibility, the more costly the sacrifice for sin. As has been previously mentioned, the males of both the flocks and herds were rarer and more valuable. Sins committed by the priest as well as by the congregation at large required expiation by a bull. An elder among the people was required to bring a male goat, and a commoner was required to bring a female goat. Other provisions for the commoner who might not be able to afford a female goat were provided in 5:7-13.

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Alternatives for the other categories were not provided. This graduated scale affirms the statement of Christ, “...to whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:47-48).

- E. *The Guilt Offering*: The fifth and final sacrifice was that of a guilt offering. It would appear based on the description of a guilt offering in scripture, that the offence concerns a sin against, “...the holy things of the Lord” (5:15) as well as any other trespass (*asham*) against the commandments of the Lord. The guilt offering is very similar to the sin offering with the exception that a male sheep (a ram) was required for atonement. The guilt offering is also an offering required when seeking ritual cleansing, such as after one has recovered from leprosy or after leprosy has been removed from a house. The guilt offering also would seem to cover sins committed with pre-mediation (such as deceiving your neighbor in a business transaction).

Point Three: *The Priest and the Offerings of God* – The final two chapters of our assigned reading for this week deal with the laws governing the priest’s execution of the above five offerings. We see three remarkable things about the obligations of the priests in this passage.

- 1) A burnt offering was to be made every morning and evening and the fire of the offering was to be kept kindled at all times (*ner tamid*).
- 2) The priest offering the sin offering and the guilt offering was responsible for eating a portion of it within the premise of the temple, thus internalizing the offering for sin.
- 3) The offerings made by fire to the Lord were clean, and anyone eating thereof had to be clean as well. If someone who was ritually unclean ate of the sacrifices of the Lord, he would be cut off from his people.

Conclusion: Of the 39 books in the Old Testament, the book of Leviticus ranks as number sixth for being the most quoted by the New Testament writers. It follows close behind Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms and Isaiah. It is probably the most overlooked and underappreciated book of the O.T. canon, particularly when one considers that the bulk of our doctrine of substitutionary atonement derives from the major concepts within this book. Though reading the numerous laws and ceremonial regulations may take discipline on the part of a modern reader, it is an invaluable discipline to exercise. As we continue our study through the book of Leviticus as well as the remainder of the Pentateuch, meditate on the many ways a thorough knowledge of Leviticus in particular can affect our work, worship and gospel understanding.

When asking, what the various rituals and laws teach us about the Law-Giver, the answer should become increasingly apparent: the redemptive historical work of God whereby he dwells among his people and allows his people to be in relationship with him requires an atonement. Mankind is not qualified from the standard of heaven to atone for his own sin; a substitute must be found. The provision of this ransom or substitute is a demonstration of God’s elective grace and cannot be attributed to any merit on the part of his people.