



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Wilderness Wanderings (Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)

LEADERS GUIDE

From lecture one:

A company of around two million people is bound to get mighty hungry! This is especially true as they wander through the barren wilderness, where crop-growing for them will be an absolute impossibility. Trade will be scarce, because they are going to be off the well-worn trading routes that run closer to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. . . .

He gives the manna in the morning, the quail in the evening in order to awaken and strengthen faith: (Exodus 16:12) "Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God." The verb *know* is an experiential word—as if to say, "They will have proof directly from Me that I actually come through on the promises I make."

The Real Story of the Exodus
by Gerad Taylor © 2009 CPH.



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 8.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator *(optional; the director may fill this role)*

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 53.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 53**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader

will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxv-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Kleinig, John W. *Concordia Commentary: Leviticus*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003. An in-depth look into the Book of Leviticus.

How Did We Get Here?

Exodus; Numbers 7–9; 11; 13–14; Deuteronomy 5–8

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

This session serves as an introduction to the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites, touching briefly on the exodus from Egypt and setting the stage for the forty years that follow it. Given this context, a clearer light can then shine upon the last three Books of Moses.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. review the exodus and the actions of the Israelites immediately following;
2. take note of the significance of these early events to the current study; and
3. be able to relate these events to further study of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 54.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

O Lord, who has called us out of darkness into Your marvelous light, we pray for the light of truth that only You can reveal to us. Open Your Holy Word to us and grant us the insight of the Holy Spirit so that we may use that Word to grow in faith toward You and love toward our neighbor. As we follow Your ancient people Israel into the wilderness during their forty years of wandering, guide us also with Your powerful hand, dealing with us not after our sins but according to Your mercy in Christ. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

1 Beginning at the Exodus (skim Exodus 12; Numbers 9)

Welcome to the wilderness! While the scriptural account of forty years of Israelite wandering is often considered “flyover” country in the world of Bible study, it is still a significant event in God's unfolding of His salvation history in the Old Testament. One's tendency is to skip all of the endless details in the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy on one's way from the mighty exodus events to the battles of Joshua in the Promised Land. All those who have ever committed themselves to read the entire Bible cover to cover can attest that there is some difficult material here to trudge through. I recall the idea that King Xerxes had, as told in the Book of Esther: he couldn't sleep one night, so he commanded the royal record of detailed minutes to be read to him. That would probably be how lots of frustrated Bible readers would approach the last three books of the Pentateuch—as a cure for insomnia!

But the wilderness wanderings writings *are*, in fact, important. This is especially the case when considering the role these books play linking the classic Old Testament watershed salvation event that occurred in Egypt with the realization of the ancient divine promise upon the crossing of the Jordan River. In their extended period of traversing the desert, God's chosen people were given a lesson to learn about their Creator and the all-important promise of a Savior that they had received from their

ancestors. Many of them did not believe, and so their bones lay scattered about the desolate terrain. Others were overcome with the difficult trials that accompanied this wandering, so that both the past deliverance and the future promise had faded in their spiritual consciousness. Roaming the wilderness was certainly not going to be easy for them.

You could say, perhaps, that we have a similar “in-between” time that we experience today, with the complete salvation already accomplished by our Lord on the cross behind us, and His glorious, heavenly final coming still ahead. Jesus is no mere footnote or interesting detail in our history! Nor is He simply a source of valuable wisdom on which we can rely to bring us worldly success. He is our guide on the journey that leads to heaven, that is, our final promised land. He is present with us in His glorified, divinely human flesh. And, just like the Israelites in the wilderness, though on earth we have no abiding city, we are moving forward toward that city that will last forever, in which we will meet the Lord face-to-face, just as a person would meet with a friend.

First, we ask as we gaze at the wilderness about us, how did we get here? What is the great event of salvation that determines our very identity? For the original wilderness wanderers, it was the exodus—the mass exit of hundreds of thousands of people, along with their possessions and animals, out of Egypt and into the remote and forbidding Sinai Peninsula. Imagine the entire city of Paris picking up and moving out of France! And not only that, but this humongous community-in-transit, which once dwelled in the fertile area fed by the unique Nile lifeline, was now headed for a land that, in comparison, had little to offer in the way of supporting resources.

Clearly, this trip to the Promised Land was going to require massive faith on the part of the Israelites. This faith was not going to originate within their own hearts, but rather it would be planted there by the gracious, yet powerful, finger of God Himself. They had witnessed the mighty plagues that the Lord unleashed on Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. They had received an enormous wealth of their captors’ goods simply because God had made the Egyptians “favorably disposed” toward them. Finally, they were rescued through the waters of the Red Sea, which were the very same waters that decisively decimated the forces that were determined to yoke them into slavery. Now that they were all to themselves in the Sinai wilderness, they saw the Lord’s guiding presence

accompanying them in the pillar of cloud. These events, taken together, are part of what Paul writes about when he speaks of the Israelites being “baptized into Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:2).

The Christian Church takes part in her own mighty deliverance—the death and resurrection of Jesus—through Baptism. Just as the wandering Israelites were referred back to what God did for them in leaving Egypt, we are helped in our spiritual journey by a constant remembrance of our living Savior. As we follow this traveling nation in their forty-year episode across the span of three biblical books, we will find how our own spiritual walk is strengthened by the comforting presence of our Lord who delivered us from the bondage of our sins.

2 Promise of Canaan (Exodus 23:20–33; Numbers 13–14)

Somewhere along the way, Moses was inspired to write the Book of Genesis, and I have no doubt that this essential history was read to the Israelites so that they would recall God’s ancient promise to their ancestor Abraham. This man, himself merely a “wandering Aramean” (Deuteronomy 26:5) like his grandson Jacob after him, had faced a great crisis in his life. His brother Haran died back at home, and his orphaned nephew Lot came along as they set out together on the westward journey. Abraham made his way up along the Euphrates River, headed for the land of Canaan. When his father Terah died, Abraham was at a personal crossroads. Do I go back home to Ur? Do I stay where I am at this in-between place of Haran? Or do I press on and head for Canaan? It was at that precise moment in Abraham’s life that the Lord stepped in.

Abraham didn’t pray for guidance. He wasn’t fishing around for contact with the Almighty God. Instead, the Lord chose him and spoke His everlasting promise to him. Abraham was not a great nation when he first received the divine promise. He had no one who would carry on after him. But the Lord bound Himself with an oath to Abraham, purely by grace, that He would give this lonely traveler two great gifts: descendants and land (Genesis 15). Both of these blessings were going to demand an impossible feat to accomplish, humanly speaking.

As you may recall, Abraham and Sarah were childless until Isaac was born to them while they were in their nineties. The Lord performed that which man says is impossible. The promised multitude of descendants would come in due time. When Abraham entered the

land of his inheritance, several different strong, well-established nations were already there. How could he root them out single-handedly? Impossible, it seemed. For the time being, Abraham and his family's next two generations simply lived in tents (Hebrews 11:9) side by side with these larger peoples and cities. The time to cleanse the land and claim the Lord's promise would also come when He determined.

Finally, when the 430 years in Egypt came to their completion, to the very day (Exodus 12:40–41), the multitude of Abraham's descendants began their journey to fulfill his promised inheritance. They had the bones of Joseph in tow, keeping in mind this family hero's firm faith in the completion of God's Word. Incidentally, he could have directed his family members to make a special funeral trip from Egypt to the family grave site and back again, just as he did upon the death of his father, Jacob. It makes you wonder if Joseph perhaps wanted to wait to have his body buried until it all would come true as the Lord had said. He wanted to participate, you could say, with his bones at least, in the great salvation event that the Holy Spirit allowed him to foresee (Genesis 50:25; Exodus 13:19).

Wandering in the wilderness was never considered as the final goal of the exodus. As Moses dutifully records Israel's civil and ceremonial laws the first time around on Mount Sinai, it was clear from the very start that the conquest and settlement of Canaan was considered a done deal from the perspective of Almighty God. (Exodus 23:23–25) "When . . . I blot them out"—the current inhabitants of the Promised Land, that is—do "not bow down to their gods nor serve them. . . . You shall serve the LORD your God." The First Commandment must rule their mind and heart. If not, they lose faith, and they reject the blessing and privilege of being God's chosen people. They reject their Savior even before the time comes for Him to die on the cross for them. Will they listen to the Lord? Or will they listen to frightened spies and distrust Him who brought them out with His all-powerful hand? Those who failed the test would not survive the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Those who believed the Lord would realize the inauguration of His inheritance that He had promised to Father Abraham.

3 Manna and Water (skim Exodus 16–17; Numbers 11)

A company of around two million people is bound to get mighty hungry! This is especially true as they wan-

der through the barren wilderness, where crop-growing for them will be an absolute impossibility. Trade will be scarce, because they are going to be off the well-worn trading routes that run closer to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. And whenever you think of a desert, you think of water, or rather, the lack of it. A well could be dug, but that doesn't serve a nation that is collectively on the move. This is going to be a real problem, to say the least, for Moses, the leader of this hungry and thirsty multitude.

The growling stomachs produce the grumbling mouths, and Moses and Aaron point out in frustration, (Exodus 16:8) "Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." Again, the lack of faith is the real issue. God would take care of them physically either way, because it remains true that He "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). The grumbling is what catches the Lord's attention—this is not an example of praying in confident faith. This is instead a serious doubt that the heavenly Father is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness to His people. He gives the manna in the morning, the quail in the evening in order to awaken and strengthen faith: (Exodus 16:12) "Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God." The verb *know* is an experiential word—as if to say, "They will have proof directly from Me that I actually come through on the promises I make." For believers, that knowledge is saving faith that rejoices in God's love and receives His provision of daily bread with thanksgiving. For those who reject Him, this direct contact is not going to be pleasant, as in the case of Pharaoh's army in Exodus 14:18, for example.

The water that God grants in the wilderness (Exodus 17) not only quenches the thirst of the children of Israel in the desert but is also a spiritual drink accompanying these wandering travelers. As Paul points out in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 10, the Red Sea event, along with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, was for the ancient forefathers a baptism "into Moses." The spiritual drink came from "the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (v. 4). Moses strikes this rock the first time with his staff, at the command of the Lord, who was standing there before them all. (The second time [Numbers 20:2–13], Moses was told only to speak to the rock, but he failed to do so). From this "stricken rock with streaming side" (LSB 534:4), flowed water to save their physical lives, and Christ the spiritual Rock answered affirmatively with His gracious presence

the all-important question on the lips of God's people, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7).

Now, when you're gathering manna and quail six days a week, and eating it seven days, before long, all your recipes are going to be exhausted! Despite the harsh slavery that they experienced in Egypt, its cucumbers, leeks, onions, garlic, and melons nevertheless started sounding really good in comparison with this monotonous, flaky bread that they picked up off the desert floor. So in Numbers 11, the people are "rewarded," so to speak, for their complaining with the meat that they had demanded, but along with that came the plague that God sent to shock them back, not into utter fealty and abject submission, but into honest repentance and faith in the Lord's unbounded mercy.

4 The Cloudy, Fiery Pillar and the Tabernacle (skim Exodus 13; 26; 40; Numbers 7–9)

These forty years, the manna and quail would follow the children of Israel wherever they went, but there was yet another constant companion, and that was the presence of the Lord Himself. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night showed up right at the very beginning of the journey. This is known in biblical studies as a *theophany*, an instance of God revealing Himself so that He can be seen. More than merely some celestial drum major or night-light, this was the Creator of heaven and earth showing up on the scene to make salvation happen for His people. In this form, the Lord repelled Pharaoh's army so that the chosen people could pass between the waves. Whenever the cloud picked up and moved on, Israel picked up and moved on. Moses would approach this cloud to speak with the Most High, and its divine brightness lit up his face.

However, the pillar of cloud and fire were not intended to be the Lord's self-appointed gracious presence all by themselves. The theophany, sometimes described in Scripture as "the glory of the LORD," would rest on a particular place to which the sinner would go and receive the necessary reconciliation with God and with his neighbor. The same vision that would fill the temple at Solomon's dedication and at Isaiah's commission also appeared to Ezekiel in the land of exile, and finally enshrouded Jesus and the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration; this glory vision would inhabit a tent in the middle of this wandering camp. Particular materials and measurements given at Mount

Sinai dictated a precise theology of worship: this is all about the Lord's gracious service to His people. Not everybody could come as near as they wanted—only the priests could approach on behalf of all the people.

The tabernacle was the inner tent at the nerve center of Israel's worship—it housed the ark of the covenant, the "testimony" to the Lord's faithful works for His people. Over the tabernacle was a larger tent, the "tent of meeting," in front of which the priests would offer their regular sacrifices. The exception of the Day of Atonement will come up in a more focused discussion later. This tent and tabernacle were situated inside a larger consecrated area known as the "court." Every tribe had its assigned place surrounding it, just as it would have a designated area once the multitude arrived in the Promised Land.

Throughout the years of wandering, the story of the Israelites centered on this quarter-acre complex. Numbers 4 and 10 painstakingly list the necessary steps to follow as the tribal camps take down all the pieces and get them ready for transport before they set out. Note the priority of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of the lineage of Christ. The Kohathites, the men of the tribe of Levi who would be entrusted with carrying this holy centerpiece, would be nestled in the middle of the travelers. They were allowed to carry the ark and all the other furnishings of the sanctuary, but never to touch them—their cousins, the priests who are sons of Aaron, were the ones set aside to do that as they covered everything in preparation for travel. These details were not arbitrary, but rather they impressed upon God's people that His gracious presence in their midst is not a freebie. Rather, this close contact with the holy and almighty God came to them by faith in the one sacrifice toward which all of these symbols point, the all-availing sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

5 Covenant and Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5–8)

In the ancient Hebrew language, the phrase used for making a covenant is *karath berith* (kah-RAHTH buh-REETH), which is literally translated as "cut a covenant." The account of the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 15 is quite explicit in detailing the process of cutting apart certain animals so that the covenanting parties may walk in the midst of them in order to seal the contract. As we noted earlier, the fiery cloud of God's presence *alone* passed between the pieces of the

animals while Abraham looked on, signaling that this was the Lord's unilateral gift to His people through their revered patriarch.

However, this one-sided testament sworn by the mouth of the Lord Himself does not imply that there is no obligation on the part of believers. It simply means that Almighty God's grace is for us to receive, not for us to demand as though He owed salvation and eternal life to us as our due. This distinction is helpful for us to keep in mind as we delve through the vast array of commandments, statutes, ceremonies, and cases that are found in this extended section of the Pentateuch. If a simplistic Law-and-Gospel comparison were to be done with each verse standing alone out of context, then the Bible student would be disappointed at the overwhelming Law content that is found. As a result, these books will be closed and unable to reveal Christ to the reader. Looking for Law and Gospel is to be encouraged, for sure, but the key is to understand what the Lord is doing in giving these laws to Moses and the children of Israel.

The covenant is not to be considered as a barter agreement between two parties—it truly is a testament in which God announces His sole act of grace for the sake of unworthy sinners. As a confession of faith in the truth that the Lord has revealed, the people respond in the appropriate ways that He outlines in these books. Moses is instructed to keep a meticulous eye on the details, not only to compel the people to realize that they are utterly lost and condemned sinners, but also (and especially) to point the repentant believer constantly to Jesus, the Messiah. That understanding will be useful as we fit the covenant and Ten Commandments in with all the other laws and directions that we'll study in the coming weeks.

This could have been one of the aims when Moses restated on the doorstep of Canaan "all that the LORD had given him" (Deuteronomy 1:3) when the Israelites were still at Mount Sinai. Of course, this "second-giving of the law" (*Deutero-nomos* is Greek for "second-law," hence, "Deuteronomy") was meant for a new generation, a people who had survived the deaths of those who rebelled against the Lord in the wilderness. What Moses wanted to make crystal clear to them, before he drops back and lets the people go with Joshua into the Promised Land, is that faith is not in the actions, rules, and ceremonies, but rather it is centered on the Lord and what He has done. The results of faith on the part of the believer should not be confused with the mighty acts of salvation that are the true decisive elements in the Israelite covenant.

Conclusion

This review has been intended to help give context to the Books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as we consider them in the rest of this study. Taken only by themselves, there might have been a greater risk that they would be mistaken as disjointed sets of rules and a hodge-podge of curious stories. Since the Israelites were not plopped into the wilderness out of the sky, this past week of introduction should help us understand the rest of their adventures that we'll address in the sessions to come.

Concluding Activities

Speak a closing prayer, make any necessary announcements, and distribute study leaflet 2.

Making Offerings

Leviticus 1–5; Numbers 28–29

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Leviticus begins right away with an in-depth look at the worship life of God's people in the Old Testament. The various offerings that are prescribed at the beginning of the book provide a constant reminder of our total dependence on our merciful, heavenly Father.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. identify and differentiate five particular offerings described in Leviticus;
2. find how these offerings fit in to the Lord's ceremonial worship plan of the Old Testament; and
3. relate these offerings to their fulfillment in Christ and the New Testament.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 58.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Almighty God, You are pleased with the offerings and worship of lowly men because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Grant us humble faith to offer before You our sincerest thanks and praise so that we may not fall to the temptation to take Your love for granted. As we see the various offerings presented to You by the children of Israel, make our lives as a pleasing aroma before Your presence and a worthy confession of what our Lord has done for us. In His name we pray. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

1 Burnt Offerings (Leviticus 1; Numbers 28:1–10)

Understanding the Book of Leviticus is all about keeping its context in mind. The book does not appear from out of nowhere. Its directions on the Divine Service that will involve the priests (the members of the tribe of *Levi*, from which the book gets its name) come as a consequence of the inauguration of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting as a place for God to meet with His people in the Divine Service. In Exodus, the story was all about getting to Mount Sinai and Moses beginning to talk to the Lord. Now that we've gotten to Leviticus, the Lord is seen speaking from His new location of gracious presence for the sake of His chosen and redeemed people. He is still speaking to Moses, the author of these first five books of the Bible, but now all of the Israelite people, and not just the priests, will be in earshot of the plans that will be drawn up for their worship of God, and for their growth in faith. Therefore, these liturgical directions build on the relationship that has already been created by the heavenly Father's saving hand, as witnessed in the events of Exodus that we reviewed last week.

Directions on personal burnt offerings start off the Lord's prescribed liturgical rubrics. Right away, we see the repetitive pattern that is set up and will continue for the rest of the book. Dr. John Kleinig, a Lutheran pastor and professor from Australia, and author of *Concordia Commentary: Leviticus*, observes that Leviticus is a practical book, like a manual, rather than a theoretical textbook (*Leviticus*, pp. 4–5). That is to say, it contains very little description of God and of His involvement

in Israel's history. The Holy Spirit has already defined these theological points in Genesis and Exodus. Later books, including the New Testament Book of Hebrews, will take on the task of explaining the sacrifices' significance. Instead of these objectives, Leviticus is meant simply to set forth the Lord's chosen process by which He interacts with His people and how they are brought into communion with Him.

The burnt offering is truly a bloody business, and we might as well start our study with it and get used to reading about this practice that seems so archaic and even a little superstitious to us modern people. Fewer and fewer of us these days will have had any substantial experience on a farm or ranch, and so the life and death of animals is largely removed from our consciousness. Perhaps you have heard, or even said, something like, "I know my meat comes from a store wrapped up in paper or plastic; anything beyond that I leave to the experts!" When we read about what is done to animals in books like Leviticus, we automatically think of our beloved pets, and our gut wrenches when we consider these "innocent bystanders" undergoing the graphic violence that God is requiring His people to commit.

If that isn't bad enough, the one offering the sacrifice doesn't simply hand over the animal to the priestly "experts" to let them do all the "dirty work." The offering bearer, for instance, walks his perfect, unblemished bull toward the bronze altar that is standing in front of the tabernacle, lays his hand on the head of the animal and himself slits its throat to kill it. The priest certainly is there to help out, catching the blood in a bowl so that it can be thrown against the side of the altar, but that last close bond is made between owner and animal as the one life is taken so that the other life is spared. What an image to carry with you! What an insight into a blood-bought forgiveness of sins. You could think about rituals like this one as you sing to Jesus in the Lententide hymn "Not All the Blood of Beasts": (LSB 431:3) "My faith would lay its hand On that dear head of Thine, While as a penitent I stand, And there confess my sin." Now you know who it is who is the real offering!

2 Grain Offerings (Leviticus 2; Numbers 28:11–15)

Not all of the sacrifices were bloody! Some of them involved the fruits of the field, and they were prepared for sacrifice in a variety of ways, as Leviticus 2 describes. There is, however, some similarity that you can make with the animal sacrifices that were offered: specifically,

that the grain offering had to be from the firstfruits. This means that the grain was recently harvested, and before there was any other common, everyday use, the first and best was taken off the top and offered to the Lord. Just as the male lamb, bull, or goat had to be unblemished, without anything that would make it undesirable for use or for food, so also the grain was not to be picked up off of the ground, or reaped from diseased plants, or the product of any other kind of afterthought.

Do you remember Cain in Genesis 4? He offered a sacrifice of "the fruit of the ground" (v. 3). Yet, the Lord did not have regard, that is, did not accept, his sacrifice. What was wrong with it? Some people think that it was only because Abel had offered a lamb from his flock, so his offering was favored while Cain's was not. But Hebrews 11 helps us figure out the rest of this story, because God had His eye on something other than the offering. Verse 4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." So, we learn from this that the offering is accepted on account of the faith of the person bringing the offering. When you understand the role of a sacrifice as an outgrowth of a person's faith and a response of trust in the saving acts of the Lord, then it doesn't seem unusual that an offering can be either a male animal or the firstfruits that are reaped from the field.

Firstfruits are mentioned today among us Christians when the topic of stewardship comes up. We sing (LSB 781:1) "We give Thee but Thine own, Whate'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee." Priorities tell us what is most important in our life. An insightful question that a boss can ask an interviewee for a job is "What do you prefer to do on weekends or whenever your schedule is otherwise wide open?" This does not mean that the interviewer is all about probing into minute details about hobbies. With this kind of question, he or she simply wants to discern a potential employee's priorities. Similarly, when we, as a first priority, set aside our offerings to the Lord of our time and talents, along with treasure right off the top, then we confess the biblical truth that all we have belongs to God. He accepts the offering, not because He needs it (see Psalm 50:7–15), but because He desires that first-priority kind of faith that demonstrates full trust in Him for all things. When our hearts become

soiled with an inherent self-idolatry that is perhaps mixed with the fear that the Lord will somehow fail to provide for us, then—as the Lord cautioned Cain long ago—(Genesis 4:7) “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

Most English translations use the term “grain offering” to describe the subject of Leviticus 2. The King James Version and Twenty-First Century King James Version (which is not the same as the New King James) both use the term “meat offering” instead. This is because of the archaic English use of the word *meat* to mean all kinds of food—as in “Thou givest them their meat in due season” (Psalm 145:15 KJV). Since today’s readers might find it confusing to come across the word *meat* when Scripture is talking about baking or roasting grain, the Hebrew phrase is most often rendered “grain offering.”

Whatever the term, this offering is included among the several that are brought to the priests and are not entirely burned in sacrifice, as opposed to what was commanded in Leviticus 1. A “memorial portion” is dedicated to the Lord, mixed with olive oil, topped with frankincense, and burnt as a “pleasing aroma,” but the rest is reserved as a food portion for the priests, the “sons of Aaron,” to eat in the courts in front of the tabernacle. In this way, the holy foods are set aside for the holy men, the priests, to eat in the holy place as their day-to-day sustenance for living that has been provided to them by God the Father’s grace, as that grace is expressed through the offerings of His holy people.

3 Peace Offerings (Leviticus 3)

Most English translations keep the term “peace offering” when they turn to the sacrificial directions of Leviticus 3. This convention flows quite naturally from the Hebrew word itself, which is related to the well-known noun *shalom*, which is Hebrew for “peace.” While the original gives the word in its plural form, so that literally it should read “peace offerings,” the translations almost always keep it in the singular. Some newer English versions have branched out into different words for this sacrifice, primarily to reflect different shades of meaning that were otherwise overlooked by the old term. The NIV editors chose to use the phrase “fellowship offering” in order to highlight the fact that this gift was given by an individual in order to foster completion or harmony (*shalom*) among the Israelite community. If you consult the New Revised Standard Version, you will find these called “sacrifice of well-being,” which further in-

terprets the concept of peace, but perhaps this translation narrows it down too far, so that it would seem to refer only to a psychological peace of mind.

You may find at first some similarities between the peace offerings of chapter 3 and the burnt offerings that are commanded in chapter 1. The directions start with cattle, then sheep and goats. Blood is drained and thrown against the altar. But then the differences start leaping out at you. This time, for the peace offering, both male and female animals are allowed. From the herd, a bull or cow is brought forward; however, the animal must still be without blemish. The same thing goes for the sheep and goats.

Another portion of the animal is brought forward for emphasis in this chapter, and that is the fat. This is not the kind of fat that is found on the meat, but rather it is the fat that is removed along with the animal’s inner organs such as the kidneys, liver, and intestines. This fat is more of a milky substance, as the original Hebrew word implies. The ancient world saw this fat as an important food and energy source for the animal, judging perhaps from the way they observed it as it burned. Dr. Kleinig notes, “The fat from an animal had special religious significance. Many pagan religions believed that just as the ‘life’ of an animal was found in its blood, its spiritual power and strength lay in its fat. Those who ate these parts supposedly gained supernatural power by eating the fat from animals that had been sacrificed to a deity” (*Leviticus*, p. 85). *The Lutheran Study Bible* includes a note on page 168 that the liver of an animal was burned in the peace offering ritual so that it could not be used in fortune-telling and divination, in total opposition to a widely held pagan belief.

As was the case with the burnt offering, the peace offering, including the fat from the animal, was burned on top of the wood that had been ignited on the bronze altar in front of the tent of meeting. The priest was to perform this action, as commanded by the Lord through Moses, following the ceremony in which he threw the blood of the sacrificed animal against the altar. The “pleasing aroma” that is mentioned here is an echo of what was already described in chapter 1. It isn’t accurate to say that the burning flesh by itself is pleasing to the Lord, as if He is informing us about a preference or a strange taste of His. Rather, the thing that makes these burnt sacrifices and their strong aromas “pleasing” to God is the solid promise that He has given to His people to believe with a faith that has been created in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. The incense mixed in

with the flour of the grain offering would have helped the aroma become a bit more pleasing to those in the courtyard as well!

One phrase that we have seen quite a bit in these first few chapters of Leviticus is “food offering.” Some versions, such as the King James, translates this instead as “an offering made by fire.” This is because the Hebrew word in question is associated with a word for fire. Recent studies and comparative research with other languages that are similar to Hebrew have brought forward other insights. Kleinig (*Leviticus*, p. 57) suggests that since not all of these offerings are burned (such as the wine in Numbers 15:10), and since not all burnt sacrifices are included in this category, the so-called “food offering” should be considered not as “an offering made by fire,” but rather as a gift that is considered as “favorably received by the Lord.”

4 Sin Offerings (Leviticus 4; Numbers 29:31–34, 38)

The first time sin is addressed in Leviticus, it is specifically the “unintentional” type of sin. This distinction is made clear by the use of the Hebrew word that technically means “miss the mark.” In setting down these regulations, God assumes that He is dealing with His faithful people. He does not naively assume that they will be as perfect and pure as the wind-driven snow, however. He is aware that a hardened, wicked intent would not be constantly driving them away from Him, that is, if they continue in His life-giving and faith-building Word.

As with the first examples of offerings, the sin offering begins with the bigger or more important animals and then proceeds to smaller ones. Since sin affects the very heart of man’s relationship with God, more ceremony and detail attends the actions that He deems necessary to clear away that barrier. Again, the section starts with the offering of a young bull, just like what was prescribed for the burnt offering, but this time the bull is meant for an unintentional sin committed by the “anointed” or high priest or by the whole congregation. The priest is held in the same category as the congregation because of the public nature of the office in which he is ordained.

Now that sin is the subject of sacrifice, the priest is required to bring some blood into the very presence of the Lord, that is, into the Holy Place, the tent of meeting in the middle of the court. On the other side of the tabernacle veil with the blood sprinkled in front of it is

a smaller altar: this is the gold-covered altar of incense. Only a very small portion of the bull’s blood is put on the horns of this altar as an atonement for sin. The rest of the blood is poured out at the base of the bronze altar of burnt offering that sits outside the tabernacle. The fat is burned on the altar, but other parts, namely the skin, dung, legs, and even the head are taken outside the camp to the ash heap to be incinerated.

The goats are used as a sacrifice to cover the unintentional sins of individual people—a male for a leader of a family group, a female for an ordinary member of the Israelites. In this arrangement, you can begin to see a reflection of the order of creation in the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. A lamb could be substituted for a goat; there is no special distinction there. Whether the sin offering is for a leader or common

this time is not sprinkled, and the priest does not put any blood on the golden altar of incense. Instead, the bronze altar of burnt offering remains the focal point for the atonement of unintentional sins committed by these people. You could imagine the people straining their ears to listen for that oft-repeated and all-important final pronouncement: “and he shall be forgiven.”

5 Guilt (or Trespass) Offerings (Leviticus 5)

The procedures for unintentional sin offerings spill over a little bit into chapter 5, but an important distinction is introduced here. So far, the sins addressed have involved an action, even though unintentional, that was committed by the individual who is offering the sacrifice to cover for that sin. There are also sins of omission, that is, where the person should have done something in obedience to God’s command, but neglected to do so.

The first example that is offered is a scenario related to the Eighth Commandment. In it, the person has received an official order to testify to a matter—like a subpoena to appear as a witness in court—and he does not. The fault is clearly his, but the offering is still a female lamb or goat, accompanied by his confession of sin, of course. Other cases are covered, such as uncleanness and uttering a rash oath.

At this point, the question may be raised, “Why does Leviticus speak as much as it does about the differences between sins, when it is true from passages like James 2:10 that all sins are equally condemning before God?” To be sure, when placed in relationship to God and

His perfect Law, all sins, no matter what their apparent differences may be to us, are deserving of temporal and eternal punishment. These ceremonial distinctions teach us the valuable lesson that different sins have different effects on our faith and on our relationship with other people. We find ourselves inside the boundaries of the much narrower topic of sanctification (the Christian's holy life of faith), a topic that should have no bearing on whether we have forgiveness or the promise of eternal life, both of which are ours solely by God's grace. And so, while our Lord Jesus Christ has perfectly fulfilled all of God the Father's laws for our justification (or our status as righteous), our Savior has also granted us full sanctification and reconciliation with our fellow human beings. The essential sacrifices, including these unintentional sin offerings, point our attention forward to the cross, where all sin, regardless of differentiation, is destroyed in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.

The last distinction addressed in this section of Leviticus is the guilt offering. Some Bible versions, such as the King James, call this the "trespass offering." Dr. Kleinig's choice here is "reparation offering" (*Leviticus*, pp. 125–40). While there are several similarities between this and the sin offering, the guilt offering adds a provision for making restitution for the sin that had been unintentionally committed. Even though malicious intent is still not connected with sins of this type, they are a little more serious than those covered by the sin offering. Whereas sin earlier had been characterized as simply "missing the mark," the trespasses here are more

serious: a "breach of faith," or a "religious sacrilege." Instances of stealing or ruining someone's property fall into this category, because on top of the confession of the sin, a reparation or compensation also needs to be made. Not only should the entire value of the stolen or damaged item be returned immediately, but a fifth of it should also be added above and beyond its value. Even though this feature is added here in the case of the guilt offering, forgiveness still comes as a result of the atonement that was made on behalf of the penitent, and not on condition of his act of making compensation. That is why we need to make a clear distinction between our atonement on the one hand, which is something God grants us as a gift, and our fruits of repentance on the other hand, which spring forth from the faith that He has planted in our hearts.

Conclusion

The offerings that are described in these first few chapters of Leviticus are required of the people to offer for themselves, rather than sacrifices for the priests to offer in public on behalf of all. As we proceed through the books of the wilderness wanderings, we will come across other regulations that will govern the people as a whole congregation.

Concluding Activities

Speak a closing prayer, make any necessary announcements, and distribute study leaflet 3.