

Understanding God in the Old Testament

A God Who Requires A Response

Leviticus 1-7

This morning I want to continue to gain understanding of the God we serve by looking at the Old Testament particularly the book of Leviticus. The more we understand the nature and character of God the more we can worship him with understanding.

There are a lot of people that worship a lot of things, yet many do so without fully understanding what it is that they choose to give worth or place value upon. Just as one cannot fully appreciate a jewel or gem without having it appraised, just as one cannot fully appreciate items kept in a museum without knowing the stories that go with them, one cannot fully appreciate God without understanding what the Word of God shows us.

The book of Leviticus is about holiness – First, holiness in the idea that **(1)The God we serve is pure in his motives, his thoughts, his words, and his deeds.** God’s purity is perfect and far beyond our comprehension and capabilities. Second, holiness in the idea that **(2)God wants us to pursue him and to separate ourselves from anything that is impure and defiling** thus following the words of **Leviticus 19:2:**

2 “Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

In the Old Testament, God’s people were to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of holiness. Their life was to focus on the things of God and away from the things of this world – to fill themselves with righteousness to the point of expelling everything earthly. Like a jug of water that is filled with juice, and as you pour more and more water into the jug thus overflowing, eventually the jug will be filled with water only.

In the Old Testament holiness was pursued through the act of sacrifices and ordinances (rules). As a person followed God’s instructions and offered their worship to him their focus in life was on God. **As New Testament believers, we know that we could offer sacrifices everyday and it still wouldn’t be enough to cover our sins, but the pursuit of holiness is still a charge given by God. It is a pursuit and not an accomplishment!**

We will never be all we need to be until we stand in the presence of Almighty God, but everyday that we live here on earth is to be lived with God and his ways in mind - to pursue a different life found in Christ and not a life found in this world, making us people who take on the incredible character of God, becoming like our Father in Heaven.

As we open up the book of Leviticus we find that it picks up where Exodus leaves off – At the base of Mount Sinai where God has been giving instructions to the people of Israel in regards to building His earthly dwelling place. Now that the Tabernacle was built God begins to give instruction as to how things will happen. He begins by giving Moses instructions as the offerings that would be offered to him by the people. Offerings were

the people's way of interacting with God – for thanksgiving, for showing respect, and for asking for his help and forgiveness. We read of five offerings:

1. The Burnt Offering (Chapter One)

This was an offering offered to God for a person's sin. It required the sacrifice of an animal without any physical defects, upon which a person's sin was placed upon as a **substitute** (to take the place of). This was a voluntary sacrifice performed by the individual and not the priests. This offering was completely consumed unlike the other sacrifices.

The greatest problem we have in this life is sin. When sin entered mankind, it disrupted the great closeness and relationship of man with God. Sin caused mankind to turn his back on God and think of other things, while mankind was created by God for his pleasure. Sin has to be taken care of and today you and I sit in the grace of God because God made a way for us to escape sin and find a reunion with him once again. The scriptures tell us in **Matthew 20:28**:

28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In all of our lives, there comes times when our desire is to eliminate anything that stands in the way of our closeness with God, including those sins that we know hinder or limit our walk with God. God asks us to lay those sins upon his Son and to give it over to him, and pursue life His way and not according to the world's standards. **We serve a God who has given us a Substitute so that we can separate ourselves to God's purposes and will for our lives.**

2. The Grain Offering (Chapter 2)

This was a voluntary offering that was made in thanks to God for his provision. **It was a way by which a person was acknowledging that everything they ate was given by God.** A portion of the flour was mixed with oil and incense and burned on the altar fire, while the rest of it was baked into bread.

Even Jesus was known as the bread of life. But there was something different about this bread in that it was made without the use of yeast. Why is that? **Yeast was not used because it is considered a fungus or mold that is impure** and remember that this sacrifice was made to a pure and holy God. Jesus, when talking about the Pharisees said in **Matthew 16:11-12**:

'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' 12 Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about the yeast in bread, but about the deceptive teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When God is worshiped, he doesn't want anything impure added to it. Many times in our worship lifestyle we want to add our styles and methods, which there is nothing wrong in them, but when issues of arrogance and pride step in it no longer is worship to God but mere show. We as human beings have our way of adding things to our worship of God that are mere distractions or side issues instead of simply worshipping him in Spirit and in Truth. **We serve a God who wants man to acknowledge his provision without any added commentary.**

It is here however that we begin to see God's provision also for the priests. We find that a portion of the flour is given to the priests as food. Thus today, don't let anyone tell you that it is wrong for a minister to be provided for by the church.

3. The Peace Offering (Chapter 3)

The peace offering is another form of gratitude. **The Peace Offering is an offering of gratitude made for provision of renewed communion and fellowship with God.** It wasn't a payment for sin, but simply a way of thanking God for the peace they now had because God's willingness to forgive and make a way for relationship once again. Unlike the burnt offering, this sacrifice allowed for the participant to eat a portion of the sacrifice.

When I think of this it reminds me of two people sitting down to eat together – sharing with each other, listening, learning, and developing relationship. **Romans 5:1** tells us:

I Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

We serve a God who wants man to value and celebrate the peace they have him despite their condition in comparison to God's holiness.

4. The Sin Offering (Chapter 4-5)

The sin offering was a required offering that was given to cover the unintentional sins that were not committed out of rebellion against God. Not every sin we commit is done intentionally – sometimes sin is the result of reaction, of character flaws, or even inabilities. But there reality is that no matter how hard we try we will never be able to master the issue of sin. Even when we try not to sin, we will sin anyway.

One of the misconceptions however within some Christian circles is that sin can be overcome and conquered in this life. In fact, even within some of the other religions they teach that complete purity and righteousness can be obtained in this life.

The sin offering is a reminder that we have a problem that cannot be solved by anything other than the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We will always have this problem on this earth. **Romans 8:3-4** tells us:

3 The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. 4 He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.*

We serve a God who reminds us of our temporary inabilities and of his eternal capabilities to cover our weaknesses. May we always be mindful of our frailty as sinful human beings.

5. The Guilt Offering (Chapter 6-7)

This is an offering offered in conjunction with the mistreatment of sacred property or sin committed against someone. Have anyone of us ever dealt with guilt? We feel guilty because we did something against someone, or because we have violated a relationship in some way. The guilt offering was a means of seeking release from this burden. Guilt is feeling the weight and responsibility of relationship. It was a way by which restitution was made.

It is a reminder to us today that we are still required to make things right in our relationships with people as we can. There are times when we are unable to, yet we are still asked to do what we can. **The guilt of violated relationships, including our relationship with God, can be released and in fact has been released for those of us who have embraced the work of Jesus as our Salvation.** The scripture tells us in **Hebrews 10:22:**

22 Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

For many today, guilt has become the stumbling block to God, yet he has offered freedom from this guilt for those who will come to him. He is the releaser of all guilt and shame and is willing to forgive. **We serve a God who want to release us from our admitted mistakes so that we can celebrate his great kindness.**

When we look at the five offerings of God here in Leviticus we see that God wants us to pursue a life of holiness. He doesn't want us to get wrapped up in the things of this world, but he want us to get wrapped up in his plans and purposes for us. God doesn't want us to remain in a state of helplessness and hopelessness, but he wants to help restore us so that we can walk in this life as celebrators of his kindness and grace. God wants us to celebrate his forgiveness, his provision, that peace we have with him, his willingness to overlook our inabilities, and his release from guilt.

We serve a God who requires a life pursuit of holiness so that each day may be lived with his perspective and purpose.

