

PARASHAH SEVENTY-FIVE

LEVITICUS 1:1–2:16; ISAIAH 48:12–49:3; EPHESIANS 5:1–10

notes by Tim Hegg

The Laws of the Sacrifices

The book of Leviticus is called וַיִּקְרָא, *VaYikra*, which is simply the first word of the book (the connection to the prophetic *haftarah* in Isaiah, which uses the verb קרא twice), “Israel whom I called...” (v. 12) and “when I called to them...” (v. 13). But why does the opening of Leviticus use the word קרא, “to call?” Usually in the narrative of the Torah, the text simply says “And Adonai said to Moses...” using the verb אָמַר or דָּבַר (both mean “to speak” or “to talk”). The 10 times that the verb קרא is used in Leviticus (Lev. 1:1; 9:1; 10:4,19; 13:45; 23:2, 4, 21, 37; 25:10) seem to indicate that it is used either when someone is at a distance, or when something is to be “proclaimed” in the sense of “affirmed” or “established.” Right from the beginning of Leviticus, then, we understand that what follows is of high importance—something essential and therefore in need of being proclaimed to Moses and to the nation as a whole. Right from the start of this book we are alerted to take special notice of the laws and regulations that govern the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple, and the priestly duties that surround them.

The Midrash Rabbah references R. Abbahu as commenting on the fact that in 1:2 the word used for “offering” is קָרְבָּן which has its root in the verb קָרַב, “to draw near.” (Note the verb קָרַב is also found in our *haftarah* – “Come near to Me,” v. 16.) Indeed, the opening phrase is literally, “When any of you brings near (יִקְרִיב) an offering (קָרְבָּן)...” The point is that *drawing near to HaShem is accomplished by bringing a sacrifice*. R. Abbahu applies this to the proselytes who desire to draw near to God and do so by bringing an offering as part of the conversion ceremony. Abbahu comments: “The names of the proselytes are as pleasing to Me as the wine of libation which is offered to Me on the altar.”

It is curious that the midrash immediately connects this to proselytes when the text obviously is directed to the “sons of Israel.” A moment’s thought gives the reasoning: in the minds of the Sages, Israel did not need a sacrifice to draw close to God. She was close to Him as His chosen people. Herein lies the basic difference between the message of Yeshua and that of the leading Sages of His day: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: *no one comes to the Father but through me.*” Whether Jew or non-Jew, there is no difference. Drawing close to HaShem can be accomplished only through the offering of a sacrifice. Thus, the native born and the foreigner draw near to God on the same basis, and are received on the same basis, i.e., God’s elective grace demonstrated in His drawing those He has chosen to Him, and forgiving their sins by the payment of an innocent sacrifice.

Fallen mankind did not need “religion” to teach him that drawing near to God could result from his own efforts. This lie is embedded in the sin nature itself. The sinner naturally believe that he or she can “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps” — that somehow, God is willing, or even obligated, to accept a person’s own efforts and genuine contrition. “God will overlook my sin, or balance it against my honest efforts to reform and to do what is right.” But such a perspective is short-sighted and rests upon the lie first offered by the enemy himself, that man could, in fact, be his own god. It is short-sighted because it fails to evaluate sin against the eternal holiness of God and it rests on a lie because the holiness of God demands full payment for sin. To think otherwise is to believe the falsehood that God is less than infinitely holy.

Herein lies the major dilemma for mankind: how can he draw near to His Creator while a sinner? How can he fulfill the very purpose for which he was created while at war with his Maker? The book of Leviticus takes up the theme of “drawing close” (קָרְבָּן, “sacrifice”) that the book of Exodus has so graphically told. Redemption from Egypt, the Tabernacle, the priesthood, the Presence of God: all of these are now carefully expounded in the intricate laws of the sacrifice. But we will only capture the message if we have this theme in mind as we study, namely, that the sacrificial and priestly service is given to us as a revelation of how God makes sinners holy and draws them to Himself in faith.

The first sacrifice to be described is the עֹלָה, *olah*, the Whole Burnt Offering. At first (1:2) the offering is prescribed to be “from the herd or the flock,” meaning from the herd of larger animals (i.e., bovine) or the

flock of smaller animals (i.e., sheep and goats). But in 1:14 provision is made for a whole burnt offering of a bird as well. We should understand this to mean that the norm would be a whole burnt offering from the herd or flock, but if these are not available, that is, if one is too poor to have cattle or sheep, then an offering of a bird is also allowed.

The point in this seems obvious: God wants all to be able to draw close to Him via the offering: one's economic status is not an issue. Moreover, we come to understand that the primary issue is that of sacrifice itself, not of one's own ability to bring the most expensive offering. In this He distinguishes Himself from the pagan gods who demand more than a person could ever give, and are never satisfied with the offering. But HaShem is concerned with the heart—the motivations for bringing the offering in the first place. If a bird is what one can bring, then this is fully received.

What is the lesson of the whole burnt offering? *Its primary significance is one's full dedication to the Lord.* The whole burnt offering, in sacrificial metaphor, acts out the Shema: loving God with *all* one's heart, *all* one's soul, and *all* of one's might. Everything is burned up to HaShem in the sacrificial flame of utter devotion and consecration.

This same emphasis may be symbolized by the necessity of the priests to wash or scrub (רחץ) the “inner organs” or “entrails” (1:9). Interestingly, the word for “inner organs” has the same root as the word for “offering,” that is, “to draw near” (קרב). But not only are the inner organs washed, so are the legs (or lower legs, כרע). Symbolically, this connects the intentions (represented by the inner organs) with one's life (represented by the legs). Even as the sacrificial animal stands as a symbolic representative of the worshipper (note 1:4 and the placing of hands upon the head of the animal as symbolically placing oneself and one's sins upon the sacrificial animal), so the washing of the whole burnt offering speaks to the overall purpose of the sacrifice, namely, full and passionate devotion to HaShem.

The עֹלָה, *'olah* or whole burnt offering is then burned in its entirety on the altar of sacrifice. Note carefully that as it is burnt up to the Lord, it is stated to be a “pleasing aroma” (ריח־נחוח) to HaShem. This is the language of acceptance, for as a pleasing aroma He accepts and rejoices in it. This acceptance is what offers the worshipper the invitation to draw close to the Great King.

In an ultimate sense, the whole burnt offering points to the sacrificial death of Yeshua our Messiah: (Ephesians 5:2) “and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” This language connects Yeshua's death with that of the whole burnt offering. In Him, we draw near to God. In Him we are accepted into God's presence. And this is possible because Yeshua, fully dedicated to His Father, completely offered Himself to the Father for our redemption.

The whole burnt offering was a voluntary offering, meaning it is not prescribed for a given transgression or for some other activity. The worshipper simply brings the whole burnt offering as a matter of worship to the Lord. Most likely, the whole burnt offering was brought to celebrate the goodness of God in one's life, or in a matter of dedication to the Lord by the individual.

Also contained in our *parashah* are the laws of the grain offering or מִנְחָה, *minchah*. Since the grain offering was made in the afternoon in the Temple, after the destruction this name was used to designate the afternoon prayer service in the synagogue as a memorial of the grain offering. (The KJV calls this a “meat” offering, but that is only because in Elizabethan English, “meat” means “food,” and particularly food prepared from grains.) The connection between the whole burnt offering and the grain offering is that they are voluntary offerings of dedication to the Lord. The grain offering, however, being far less expensive and far easier to offer, must represent the everyday kind of blessings that constantly evoked thanksgiving to God in the heart of the worshiper. While the whole burnt offering spoke to a significant, life changing event, the grain offering was an offering to God for the daily blessings of life—for the “common” things we come to realize are not, in reality, common, but the constant blessing of HaShem upon our lives.

The grain offering, in the first place, was to be of wheat ground fine, mixed with oil and frankincense (לְבִנְיָהּ, *l'vonah* most likely from the root לבן, “to be white” since it was taken from a pitchy sap of the *storax-tree* that formed in white deposits). It could also be prepared at home in either the common oven or in a pan, and then brought to the priests to put on the altar. In the case of the *minchah*, a memorial portion (אֶזְכָּרָה, *'azkarah*) is burnt upon the altar, and everything else belongs to Aaron and his sons as their portion. But it can only be eaten by them, and in a holy place. It is קֹדֶשׁ קְדָשִׁים, “most holy” (cf. Exodus 26:33; 33:10).

The connection of the two offerings is that both speak to the dedication of one's life to HaShem. In the

first case, the emphasis is upon the need to dedicate oneself fully, without reservation. The whole of one's life is offered up to the Lord. This, then, was a fitting foreshadow of the life and death of Yeshua. The grain offering emphasizes that all of our lives, even the "common" parts, are to be lived out unto the Lord. All too often the things of the Lord are considered a *part* of our lives, or worse, a separate compartment of our lives. It is the religious part which is merely a percentage of the whole. But the Torah perspective is different: covenant life, lived out in the presence of the Almighty, is all for Him, in its entirety.

This life of full dedication to the Lord is one characterized by righteous living: "Be holy as I am holy," (the theme of Leviticus, cf. Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8). Even as Yeshua offered Himself, both in life and in death, fully to the Almighty, so our lives must be a "soothing aroma" to Him. This is possible only as we draw close to God and, in the power of the Spirit, walk as Yeshua walked, fully and passionately dedicated to the sanctification of God's Name in our lives and in the life of our community.