

### LEVITICUS

#### Lesson 2 - Introduction Continued

Last week we looked at some basics about Leviticus to set the stage for our study.

This week, before we get into the details of the “burnt offering” which is the first subject of the first chapter of Leviticus and a very specific type of the **several** types of sacrificial offerings, there are some principles we need to address. Some of these principles don’t jump right out of us, and in fact, are not actually stated until we get into Numbers and then Deuteronomy. However, it’s good to know them BEFORE we read Leviticus, because then we don’t make assumptions that turn out to be false.

One of the most enlightening, yet least understood, theological elements of the sacrificial system is this: the Levitical sacrificial system that God gave to Israel did **not** have a remedy for all sins committed. That is, while the sacrificial system was primarily, though not entirely, established by Yehoveh for the purpose of atonement of sins, not every sin could be atoned for.....not every sin could be covered by an animal sacrifice. Chew on that for just a moment, and think about the ramifications, since Jesus Christ is **said** to be the fulfillment of that very same sacrificial system. This concept is among the reasons why, today, we have these great theological debates between very reasonable, knowledgeable and Godly men over whether or not ALL of our sins, under every possible circumstance, are covered by Yeshua’s passion on the Cross. These debates are typically held under the title of “Eternal Security”...or, as a question that many a Believer has wrestled with, “can you lose your salvation?”

Since the Levitical sacrificial system did NOT provide atonement for some sins, but did for others, which is which? What sins could someone commit for which they could not turn to the sacrificial system to atone for them..... to provide them with Yehoveh’s forgiveness? The Torah is very clear on this: **intentional** sins (in general) cannot be atoned for. Sometimes we will see words used in the Bible to describe this category of sins as “high handed”, or “great”. The idea is that this is a category of sin for which there is no excuse in God’s eyes. They were premeditated sins. These sins involved denying either the truths of the Holy Scriptures or Yehoveh’s righteousness in pronouncing and enforcing the laws and ordinances He gave to Moses. These were sins of out and out defiance against the King of the Universe. They were planned, or committed with gross negligence; that is, committing a sin that you fully knew was a serious sin, but you did it anyway (has anybody done that recently?). All that the sacrificial system atoned for was **UN**-intentional, non-high handed sin. We’ll slice that onion a little thinner as we go, but for now, I’d like to give you a couple of examples as to how the Torah classifies sins, in order that you get the bigger picture.

Murder is an intentional and highhanded sin. While we may have an ongoing debate in

America about whether ANY killing of a human being is murder....you know, the death sentence for certain criminal acts, or even death resulting from military combat.... Biblical Law made it all pretty cut and dried for the Israelites: the killing of a human fell into two basic categories, justified or unjustified. Justified killing was not murder. Justified killing would be, for example, that you caught an UNARMED thief in your house AT NIGHT, had no way to make a quick judgment as to the level of danger this thief posed to you and your family, and so you killed him. In the Law of Torah, you were justified in killing because you were assumed to be protecting life.... yours, your guests, and your family's. Killing that same UNARMED thief during daylight hours, however, when you reasonably could have discerned whether the thief was a known dangerous criminal and whether or not he was armed, is **Un**justified. Taking his life, in this case, was only about protecting property, and God does not allow that trade-off.....life for property. Any Hebrew would know this. Therefore, the unjustified killing was an **intentional** sin and NOT coverable by sacrificial atonement: but the justified killing was NOT intentional, and therefore WAS coverable by sacrificial atonement.

Another example: adultery. If a married man had sex with a married woman who was not his wife, this was an intentional sin. They both knew the Law on this matter, or should have because the prohibition against adultery was common knowledge. It was not accidental nor was it a mistake, and it certainly was not justifiable. Therefore, this was NOT covered by the sacrificial system, and atonement could NOT be made for this. That person was usually cut-off...executed for this sin. And, by the way, execution, usually by stoning, was itself considered justifiable killing, and therefore Unintentional killing, and it was atoned for using the sacrificial system.

So what happened to those who could not make sacrificial atonement for their sins, because the sins they committed were classified as intentional? They were turned over to the other part of God's justice system, the curses of the Law. That is, ALL unintentional sins could be remedied by a proper sacrifice.....the sacrificial system atoned for them....this was a great blessing because by God's grace your sin could be atoned for. BUT NO intentional sins could be covered by the sacrificial system; now it was a matter for the curses of the Law. Let me be clear; I'm not talking about Law in some vague sense, or some local criminal justice system. I'm talking about the Biblical Law as found in the Torah. To be fair, some unintentional sins did require reparation in addition to a sacrifice if there was an injured party. For instance, a man's donkey broke its leg in a hole you had dug and failed to cover up. You would have to make an animal sacrifice at the Tabernacle, AND make reparation to the man for the loss of his donkey. But, in doing so, you have BOTH made peace with God and fairly compensated the injured party for your error. Now you're OK.

Please bear with me as we go through this. This such an important principle to apprehend because it not only will help us understand the OT Hebrew mindset, it will aid us wonderfully in understanding so much of what Paul was talking about in so many of his references to the law in his letters to the various churches.

**Turn your Bibles to Numbers 15:27-30.**

"If an individual sins by mistake, he is to offer a female goat in its first year as a sin offering.

The priest will make atonement before Yehoveh for the person who makes a mistake by sinning inadvertently; he will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven. ....no matter whether he is a citizen of Israel or a foreigner living with them. You are to have one law for whoever it is that does something wrong, by mistake. But, an individual who does something wrong intentionally, whether a citizen or a foreigner, is blaspheming Yehoveh. That person will be cut off from his people. Because he has contempt for the Word of Yehoveh, and has disobeyed His command, that person will be cut-off completely; his offense will remain with him”.

This is a great example of what is called the curse of the Law. Now if you ever wondered why so many pastors, teachers, and church leaders prefer not to teach, nor really even have you read, the OT, this passage is certainly at the top of the list. This statement, and the principle it so clearly and unambiguously spells out, is a thorny theological problem when trying to fit it in with modern day doctrines. Because even though most modern pastors are generally unfamiliar with the OT, they would unhesitatingly agree with the statement that Jesus satisfied all the requirements of the sacrificial system. We've all heard that from the pulpit, and probably everyone in this room would agree with that statement as well. But, exactly which sacrificial system are they referring to? That Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, once and for all, and an authorized substitute for all those prescribed animals deaths that were used to atone for sin within the Bible's sacrificial system, as found in Leviticus, is absolutely accurate.....those Pastors and I would have no problem with that. But, what do we do about the stark reality that God plainly said that now that you know what is right and wrong in my eyes, to **intentionally** do wrong, is to sin against Me....to BLASPHEME against Me; and for that you will be cut-off, and for those sins there is no atonement...they will stay with you forever. Yikes. This is a much more difficult issue when we actually examine the sacrificial system, than when we are blissfully ignorant of it and just assume some things that aren't so; that is, when we look at the actual words of the Bible, in context, and not just accept a greatly distilled and unquestioned doctrine that fits a predetermined agenda.

Bear with me. I know some of you are getting uncomfortable with this, and may think you know where I'm headed. And you're probably wrong so hang in there.

The Hebrews knew they had a big problem here. The Torah simply does NOT provide a way for an Israelite to reconcile with God, once that Israelite commits a “high handed”, or “great” sin. So, in time, the writers of the Jewish Traditions took over. You can read of all kinds of remedies for this seemingly insolvable problem in the Talmud. After all, who wants to commit one of these high-handed sins, and then go through life knowing that your fate is inescapable? The great sages and Rabbis made sweeping pronouncements that ranged from saying that the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was what covered the **intentional** sins; even saying that doing good deeds and/or showing heartfelt repentance covered intentional sins. Some said that being sorry enough, or studying Scripture enough, or doing a GREAT act of repentance or a GREAT good deed could even, almost magically, turn that intentional sin into a deed that had MERIT in Yehoveh's eyes. Of course, none of this is in the Holy Scriptures. But, this just highlights what a serious matter intentional sin is, and how these Hebrew religious authorities would go to such great length to conjure up these tortured procedures on how to rid THEMSELVES of this rejection by God due to their commission of an intentional sin. Let me

put this in modern terms: what we call the unforgivable sin, they called the intentional sin, because, generally speaking, these sins had no available means of atonement...therefore, they remained unforgiven indefinitely.

Back in Exodus we started reading about the 1st of the series of laws given to Israel, which began with the 10 Commandments. In Hebrew thinking there is no difference between religious and civil law.....they are one in the same. The religious Biblical Law WAS also the civil law. The Biblical Law was ALL the law that the Hebrew society lived under (at least while they were governing themselves). They would have laughed at our questionable Western concept of separation of Church and State. We learned of laws, in Exodus, prescribing immediate death for adulterers and murders and idolaters, and of other laws that even prescribed death for gross negligence. Some laws dealt with property, and therefore, usually involved reparations when wrong was done. Someone discovered to be a thief was not jailed; instead they had to make reparations to the person they stole from. And, these reparations always involved giving back well more than the amount they took. There were laws involving accidental injuries to people or animals, and the remedy for these was also normally reparation. If you couldn't or wouldn't make any of the required reparations, your life was turned over to that person who had been harmed or suffered loss, more or less as a slave, until you worked off that debt to him. These sorts of issues, their remedies and punishments, are all covered in the Biblical Law.

So a good way for us to understand the justice system God set up for Israel is to think of it as consisting of two primary components: the **Law**, and the **Sacrificial system**. Now, a Hebrew would want to argue a little about what I just said on some technical merits, and they would be correct; because technically, the sacrificial system is contained within the Law as **part** of the Law, at least in the common way of speaking. But the FUNCTIONAL way that the Biblical justice system operated also made the Law and the Sacrificial System as somewhat separate systems, used for different...nearly opposite.....purposes.

Some time ago, back in Exodus, we went into great detail about God's justice, which in Hebrew is called Mishpat. The Law is NOT God's justice, it is but **part** of God's justice. The Law had a role to play in God's justice system, just as the sacrificial system had a role to play in God's justice system.

One foundational principle underlying God's justice system is quite similar to our American legal system whereby we declare some crimes less serious than others, and so we classify the offenses accordingly and we have different processes of how we deal with the less serious versus the more serious. We generally classify the less serious crimes as misdemeanors, the more serious as felonies. To make an analogy, admittedly imperfect but close enough to make the point, the sacrificial system atoned for misdemeanors..... but NOT for felonies (please don't take that too literally). God, in His justice system, defined a misdemeanor as committing an unintentional sin.....and a felony as committing an intentional sin. Whereas we Believers want to classify sins according to big ones and little ones.....bad ones and not-so-bad ones....a little one is cheating on your taxes, a big one is robbing a bank, and a bigger one is premeditated murder.....it seems that God begins by classifying sins as unintentional or deliberate.

We have to remember that ALL crime among the Hebrews was sin. Everything a Hebrew did wrong was first and foremost an offense to God....and the OT Hebrews saw it that way. Certainly the doing of wrong often, and usually, manifested itself in the form of someone doing harm against somebody else. But the key is that all right and therefore all wrong was defined by God; so in **all** cases wrongdoing of any kind among Israelite society was in violation of Yehoveh's laws, so every wrong was a sin.

Let's be very clear before we even start to read Leviticus: the sacrificial system's purpose was **not** to extract a penalty from the wrongdoer. The sacrificial system was **not** an escalating system of penalty fees or fines in the form of more valuable or less valuable animals, the choice of which depended on the severity of your offense. The idea was NOT so much that the bigger the sin, the bigger and more expensive the animal you had to give up. You didn't pay a dove for a tiny sin, and a bull for a giant sin. The sacrificial system was there to MAINTAIN your relationship with God, and to REPAIR it if it got broken as a result of your sin. It was there to BENEFIT the sinner far more than to appease God. And whatever form the appeasement of God was to be, it was not about paying Him off.....it was about obedience and reconciliation within His system of justice so that you could have your relationship with Him restored.

Let me put it another way, and please pay close attention because it may change the way you've ever looked at the Law: the sacrificial system represented the **blessings** part of the Law, and the curses of the Law represented the **punishment** part of the Law.

If an Israelite sinned Unintentionally, he could always turn to the sacrificial system that is laid out in detail in Leviticus, and be reconciled with God. Is that not exactly what we Believers in Yeshua rely on? When we sin we turn to the sacrifice of Jesus as our way out. If in committing a sin a person did harm to another person, either financially or bodily, then some reparation to that harmed person was usually prescribed, together with the appropriate animal sacrifice at the Tabernacle as reparations to God. Further, forgiveness.....real forgiveness, not some inferior kind..... atonement was achieved, and peace with God was restored to the wrong doer, the sinner, through the indispensable sacrificial system that was the agent of atonement. They were blessed by this process, rather than punished.

However if someone sinned intentionally, high handedly, they could NOT go to the sacrificial system and gain reconciliation with God. Instead they were to be dealt with under the curses of the Law. Instead of being under the blessing and **grace** of the sacrificial system, they were put under the punishment (the curse) of the Law. Let me state that again: the sacrificial system was based entirely on grace. It was the animal that lost its life rather than the person who committed the sin. The curses of the Law, however, were different. And when a sin was of the type that required a punishment UNDER THE LAW, although Hebrews usually did not lose their physical lives (but sometimes they did), they DID lose their relationship with God, and there was really no defined method to regain it. This was a terrifying possibility that every Hebrew faced every day of his entire life. I mean, did an Israelite honestly believe he could go his entire life and never ONCE **intentionally** break one of God's laws? Never ONCE have a bad day and deliberately sin?



The sad reality is that as much inner enjoyment as too many of us get in looking back at those stiff-necked Hebrews who tended to wander off into idolatry from time-to-time, and comparing them to ourselves who would NEVER do such a foolish thing as bow down to a pagan god, those Hebrews' sins were almost always **unintended**. They worked like mad NEVER to sin. How about us? We're almost the exact opposite. Church doctrine and tradition has led us to the point that we hardly ever, IF ever, **consider** unintentional sin, AS sin. Our view is that if we didn't mean it, or didn't even recognize it, there's nothing to it. As a matter of fact it's almost not a sin if you didn't know you were being disobedient; that ignorance of the Law **is** an excuse and can actually be to our advantage. And yet it was precisely this KIND of sin, the unintended sin, that the sacrificial system was designed to accommodate. It was the unintentional sins for which millions, perhaps billions, of God's animals were put to death to atone for things men did....things they gave little thought to.

Almost all of the sins that we modern Believers currently think of as the everyday variety of sin actually falls into the category of deliberate and intentional. We mean to do it, even though later we might regret it. We know that its wrong, but we do it anyway. We know it's an offense to God, but we choose to consider the consequences later. When we have sin to confess to God it is usually, by the Biblical definition, an INTENTIONAL sin that we are confessing. And the Levitical sacrificial system did NOT cover this type of sin.

Since the sacrificial system of the Bible only covers sins that weren't intended, and **if** Jesus fulfilled ONLY THAT system, where does that leave us when most of the time we sin deliberately? Well, here's the good news: just to help demonstrate how Paul saw Christ as fulfilling MORE than the Levitical sacrificial system, with all its definitions of what it could and could not atone for, we only have to go to Romans 3:25.

READ Romans 3:23-25

".....since all have sinned and come short of earning God's praise. By God's grace, without earning it, all are granted the status of begin considered righteous before Him, through the act redeeming us from our enslavement to sin that was accomplished by the Messiah Yeshua. God put Yeshua forward as a kapparah for sin through his faithfulness in respect to his bloody sacrificial death."

Now, what did Paul just say here? First, understand that where my Bible has the word kapparah, yours may say "mercy seat" or "sacrifice of atonement" or some such thing. **Kapparah** is just Hebrew for atonement. But, in the Greek, the word used here is **hilasterion**, which is used two other places in the NT, and BOTH times is referring to the Mercy Seat....the lid to the Ark of the Covenant. So it's not wrong to translate this as atonement. But when we realize that it is MORE referring directly to the most important furnishing in the most important location of the Tabernacle, which is central to the Levitical sacrificial system, then we see how thoroughly tied together the Levitical sacrificial system and Jesus Christ, is. Yet even that is not FULLY representative of what it is that Yeshua fulfilled.

A key phrase in the verses we just read was "enslavement to sin". That phrase, or others very similar, has always received much attention among Believers. But if we'll apply what we've

learned today.....that once a Hebrew committed an intentional sin, and there was no hope for atonement for that.....it lends NEW meaning to the words “enslavement to sin”. Commit an **intentional** sin, and indeed, you are its slave forever. There is no escape from an Intentional sin under the Levitical sacrificial system. THIS is closer to the meaning it had to Paul, because by the Hebrew thinking of that day, it was **intentional** sins that were the problem because these hung over your head forever. You were **not** a slave to Unintentional sins, but rather to Intentional sins, because the sacrificial system as it existed from Moses’ day forward was fully capable of dealing with the unintentional sins that Hebrews committed.

Notice the first portion of our Romans 3 scripture that we just read: It says that BECAUSE not one person has ever gone his lifetime without sinning, that by God’s grace there is now a method by which ALL those sins can be atoned for. To Paul it was obvious that Messiah did something MORE than what the Levitical Sacrificial System was capable of doing; and what Christ could do was to atone for the INTENTIONAL sins in our lives as well as the unintentional.

You now have a good idea of the basic principles of the justice system (mishpat) the Israelites lived under. It’s no wonder that over the centuries the Hebrew Scribes, Sages, and Rabbis eventually developed a lot of tradition to deal with the inflexibility and seeming harshness of such a system that had no remedy for intentional sins. And those traditions they developed in many cases simply overturned God’s ways and replaced them with man’s ways, because it better fit with their evolving philosophies of life and fairness and justice and their NEED to get rid of their guilt. They ignored that God had a purpose for this system of Laws and sacrifices that did NOT have a way to atone for every type of sin; and that the prophets told them that a remedy for their predicament was on the way.....to be provided by Yehoveh Himself.....in the person of Messiah.

It helps us to understand why the more educated an Israelite was (in Biblical times higher education was ONLY religious education), the more STRICT he was, generally speaking, in demanding that those around him follow the Law, as well as how scrupulous he was on following the law himself. Because better than most, he understood the limited ability of the sacrificial system to atone for his sins.....that is, what it could atone for, and what it could NOT.

But also look at the burden every Israelite carried. One careless or rash moment basically carried an eternal sentence. Commit a sin that the sacrificial system was not built to atone for and beyond the criminal punishment you might receive from the Law, you were now at war with God forever. Since the only way, in God’s justice system, to atone and be forgiven was an animal sacrifice within the context of the sacrificial system protocols, but what you did was not covered by that system....well.....you were done for. Are you getting the picture?

This, of course, was the world that Paul and all of the Jews in Christ’s day lived in. This was the world the Hebrews of the Old Testament, beginning with Moses, lived in. Paul, as a highly positioned Pharisee, understood the realities of God’s justice system to a degree that the common folk didn’t. It was his profession to contemplate this difficult reality, day and night. Imagine the mental energy necessary to try to control your will so thoroughly as to NEVER in your lifetime commit a deliberate sin; the effort must have been exhausting. But the failure to

avoid such sin was so terrible that NOT to work yourself to exhaustion to avoid it was unthinkable. The common folk understood their situation, but they had lives to live, mouths to feed, and most didn't go to bed at night, and then wake up in the morning, and re-examine their position with God. For Paul, as with all the other Pharisees, however, it was the center of all their thoughts.

You see when Paul and other Pharisees went around strong-arming fellow Jews....it wasn't only followers of Jesus who they were accusing of crimes and arresting. It was everyday traditional Jews. Because primarily what Paul's job was, or at least he seemed to take the greatest delight in, was to look for Jews who had committed an **intentional** sin.....because THAT person NOW was going to be dealt with harshly. That person would now be UNDER THE CURSES OF THE LAW (how many times have you heard that expression?), as opposed to **under** the sacrificial system. That person was now out of fellowship with God and subject to punishment by men. This was the system Judaism operated under in Biblical times.

With that as a perspective, is it no wonder that the SAVED Paul came to use such harsh words when describing the Levitical sacrificial system and the Law **in comparison** to Christ? For in fact what made Christ's blood so precious to Paul was that it DID cover sins that **were** intentional. You see, even though Christ is often described as our High Priest, He is not the type of High Priest that Aaron represented; He is MORE than the High Priesthood started by Aaron, because He is actually closer in type to what Moses was. The Bible tells us that the Messiah will even be "after the order of Melchizedek", who was both king and high priest. Even though Yeshua provided the once and for all sacrifice that had formerly been the purpose of the Levitical Sacrificial System, He was MORE than what that system could provide. He also provided what the Passover provided, and THAT was the key.

Let me explain: The Passover sacrifice was not really part of the Law per se or the general Sacrificial System.....it actually came BEFORE that. The Biblical Feasts (even though contained within a body of Scripture that is loosely called Law) generally functioned somewhat separately, and had different purposes than the Laws of do's and don'ts. The Passover sacrifice is a case in point: it was not about atoning for sins, was it? The Passover sacrifice was originally established as a means of being protected from death. Lambs' blood was smeared on doorposts in Egypt so that God's wrath, His hand of death, would not come to the homes of His people and kill the firstborn sons. When the Israelites celebrated Passover, it was for them a remembrance, a memorial holiday, to recall God freeing them from Egypt and protecting them from death...it was not about atonement for sins. Of course it had much deeper significance that they **didn't** comprehend.....that it was a foreshadowing of Christ's death on the Cross. But the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb had NOTHING to do with the sacrificial system whose job it was to make peace with God by means of atonement.

When Yeshua died on the Cross **at least** 2 things were accomplished that directly affects us: One, He paid the price with His blood for our sins.....He atoned for our sins.....intentional and unintentional. Two, as the Passover Lamb, His blood marked us to be passed over for the Eternal Death....Spiritual Death....which the Bible describes as, first and foremost, eternal separation from God.



Further what had infuriated the Jewish religious authorities about Jesus, even beyond His claim of being Messiah, was that during the time of His ministry He was running around giving divine forgiveness to those who had committed INTENTIONAL sins!! Jesus was pronouncing that the person who put their trust in Him could achieve reconciliation with God even after committing an *intentional* sin. My goodness, even the sacrificial system, the holiest most blessed, gracious and powerful part of the entire Hebrew justice system, couldn't do that!!

So as we move along through Leviticus keep that perspective in mind. Nothing in the sacrificial system that we're about to study atones for INTENTIONAL sins. And as you have occasion to read Paul's books in the New Testament, try to grasp just how INFERIOR the sacrificial part of the Law must have seemed to him, once he comprehended what Yeshua's death had accomplished. Paul never says the Law is obsolete or dead; he only says that **compared** to Christ, the Law (primarily the sacrificial portion) is as nothing. Amen, brother! That by faith in Christ, you now are subject to Christ's grace when you intentionally sin, instead of subject to the curses of the Law when you intentionally sin is too wonderful for words. You can be sure that while Paul is awestruck at how Yeshua can provide for "forgiveness of sins", that what he was thinking about, at least what was in the forefront of his mind, was INTENTIONAL sins...because Paul took it for granted that Unintentional sins **could** be forgiven....as they always had, by means of a proper animal sacrifice, since the days of Moses. Also keep in mind that Paul NEVER compared the ability of Christ to forgive against the Law's FAILURE in that same area. The Law never **failed** in forgiveness because it was never designed to forgive....or to atone....every Jewish child knew that much. But guess what.....the sacrificial system DID provide a means of forgives but it was limited to the unintentional sin. As an analogy of the Law: when compared to the incredible flying ability of Eagles, are Elephants failures? Of course not. Elephants don't FAIL to fly, because they were never built to fly. The Law portion of God's justice system was not designed to atone or forgive, but to draw a line between obedience to God and disobedience to God. The Law established moral choices for humankind; in doing so it showed us what sin is. The sacrificial system, on the other hand, **was** designed to achieve forgiveness by means of atonement. But the sacrificial system had limits; it could ONLY deal with a certain class of sin and then on a case-by-case basis. Both systems, both parts of God's justice system, did what they were designed to do, perfectly.

Now using all that I just told you as the lens through which to view Leviticus, next week we'll take a look at the first type of sacrifice addressed in Chapter 1, the burnt offering, and discover what it was intended to accomplish.