

LEVITICUS

Lesson 5 - Chapter 3

We have now looked at the two types of burnt offerings; that is, two types of sacrifices that were placed onto the Brazen Altar and consumed by fire. And those were the 'Olah and the Minchah. The 'Olah involved the burning up of animals, the Minchah the burning up of plant life, grains. And I have emphasized that despite all the attempts to explain the purposes and essences of these offerings that the Bible, at this point of our study, makes it clear that it was **the smoke** from the sacrifices that was a primary element, and that **the smoke** was a pleasing aroma to God.

Now, the question is, how are we modern Christians to take this? Are we to believe that Yehoveh literally inhaled the smoke, and loved how it smelled, and THIS was the purpose of burning up animals and plants? Well in the minds of the Hebrews of that day it certainly **was** a major reason for the ritual. Of course this causes us some concern doesn't it? Because immediately a mental picture comes to our minds of pagans sacrificing to their gods; and the pagan gods ate food, drank wine and beer, had sex, partied, fought among themselves, murdered one another, and more. So it would be a little easier to swallow if the several references to God smelling the fragrant aroma of the smoke from the burnt offerings in Leviticus chapters 1 and 2 were speaking of PAGAN rituals made to PAGAN gods.....but they're not....they're speaking of Yehoveh, the God of Israel....and these are HIS words. These sacrificial rituals of Leviticus have always created a problem for the Church and allegorizing it away has generally solved the problem.

To begin to deal with this issue, here's what we must understand: all religions came from essentially one source. Therefore, there are many similarities between the myriad of religions practiced around the world.....from Christianity, to Judaism, to Hinduism, Buddhism and all the rest. Without taking up too much time, let me flesh this out a little.

No more than about 5 years ago the world's academy of Linguists (these are academics who study languages) came to a conclusion they had been desperately trying to avoid for decades: all evidence indisputably pointed toward the existence, at one time, a single mother-language. In other words it is now irrefutable that all languages came from one.....long ago there was but a single, universal language; but over time, it somehow changed into many and it appeared to happen almost overnight. Now this isn't really startling to any **child** who's ever attended Sunday School or been taught Torah.....because how and approximately when this transformation of one single language into many took place, is told in the Bible. It happened at the Tower of Babel, and it was Yehoveh who caused it to happen both as a judgment for rebellion, and in order that people would disperse and repopulate the world more completely.

But, from that same incident, something else of profound importance happened: the perverted worship that was occurring at the Tower of Babel, as led by Nimrod, also changed and multiplied and followed all those dispersed people who now spoke different languages. And the Bible calls the evil caldron of the many pagan religions that resulted, and that had their origin in Babel, the Babylon Mystery Religions. For all practical purposes **all** false religions (which by definition are any who do not call solely on the name of the God of Israel) are Babylon Mystery Religions and they all have similar characteristics.

After the Flood the entire world's population consisted only of Noah's immediate family. And the family knew Yehoveh well; they were dedicated to Him, knew who He was, what He expected of mankind, they knew that He wanted sacrifices to be accomplished for a variety of reasons, and they had a pretty good handle on God's program. All of Noah's family believed and practiced the one and only pure worship of the one and only True God. Eventually, though, in fairly short order, Noah's descendants started to go their separate ways and as they did they began to add their own thoughts and desires that sprang from their sinful human nature, to the proper worship of Yehoveh. By the time of Nimrod mankind was once again thoroughly corrupt, as was their worship. By the time of Nimrod they again began worshipping false gods, non-gods, like before the Flood. Yet, due to mankind's common point of origin, each of the world's new religions took with them the common memory of the essential doctrines of the true God who created them....but they modified and twisted meanings and practices. When you study them closely the world's false religions are far more similar on the surface than they are unique; they all pretty much look alike. It's primarily cultural issues and traditions and names of the various gods that separate them.

This is why we find so much commonality among the world's false religions: for instance they all tend to have a flood story in their early history. Why? Because there WAS a flood, and because all of the world's cultures and people came from the family who survived the Flood: Noah's. Most have a god hierarchy that consists of a chief, supreme god (a male), his wife, and their son. Why? Because God's plan of having His son come into the world by means of a woman was known from the earliest days. Almost all pagan religions have their chief deity's son dieing and being reincarnated for that reason. Almost all pagan religions insist there was a creation of all things caused by a god or goddess...because that, indeed, is how it was; and these same religions also insist there will be a definite end of the world also caused by a god....because indeed that is how it **will be**. Almost all pagan religions have holy books, speak of an eternal god that is self-existent, and a realm of spirit-beings, some evil some good. Almost all pagan religions perform sacrifices to a god or gods, and usually it involves these sacrifices being burned up by fire on an altar with the smoke rising up to the gods who either live in, or just above, the clouds.

The point I'm making is that many elements of the worship practices of the Israelite religion that we see being laid out by Yehoveh **were** similar to pagan worship practices already in existence in that era, BECAUSE almost all elements of pagan worship practices were simply highly corrupted versions of the original and true worship of the Father. What we see God doing with Moses, Israel and the Law, is reestablishing His justice and worship system. He's cleaning things up and reestablishing proper and true worship and doctrine just as when He cleaned things up by destroying the entire world's population with a great flood and then

starting over with a remnant.....Noah.. Let me attempt an admittedly inadequate illustration of this: I don't know if anyone here is into refinishing furniture; I don't particularly enjoy it but I have DONE it! You can find the most horrible looking used desk or chair or table, with layers and layers of paint and dirt and goo that have been added to it over the years; but with some work and some chemical stripper it is possible to remove all that accumulated stuff that never belonged there and underneath it all rediscover a beautiful natural ORIGINAL wood surface. That piece of furniture that looked like junk is restored from all its ugliness to its original state and purpose. Yet it's still the same piece of furniture. That's what God was doing with Israel and the Law.....removing all the stuff that didn't belong there, and bringing a remnant of humanity back into a condition that was closer to the way He had made us. All the stuff that had no place in proper worship of the one, true, almighty God was being stripped away and discarded.

We find in the Holy Scriptures that it is standard operating procedure for God to take people and cultures (just as they are) and then use common elements of the culture those people are completely familiar with as learning tools and illustrations of His grand plan. The Hebrews, in the time of Moses, pictured God in much the same way as everyone on earth pictured their gods and goddesses....as some kind of a super-human race. They weren't entirely correct, but that IS how they thought of Him (and I have news for you....a lot of modern Christians essentially see God that same way, they just don't realize it). He was a God who, in the minds of the Hebrews, would speak, walk, jump with joy, swing a sword, and yes, smell the fragrant aroma of incense and the smoke of the burnt offerings.

It takes a long time, in human terms, for men to adopt REAL change. God has spent millennia bringing man from the birth of our existence in Adam and Eve, to where we are today. And along the way the Lord has used our familiar surroundings and practices, even our every day human characteristics and foibles, to teach us the truth: and He has progressively shown us more of Him and more of His plans, one understanding built on another, as time has marched on. His principles and purposes are perfect and they have never changed.....but they have transformed. From the sacrifice of animals and grains to achieve peace with God, it transformed to the sacrifice of Christ. What righteousness consisted of transformed from personal obedience and good behavior, to being in union with the one in whom we place our faith.

What I want you to take from this, is this: in our study of Leviticus and the sacrifices and the stated and implied reasons for those sacrifices, don't have worry and anxiety over taking the Word of God literally, even though it at times really bothers our modern minds, and seems to attack our sensibilities.....especially in the older books of the Bible. Too many of our great Christian leaders and teachers have decided that the flock is unable to handle some of these realities of Bible history, and so tell us that what we're reading is not really what we're reading....that it means something else entirely. They're afraid we might lose faith if we see too much paganism and imperfection tangled up in our faith roots and in our Bible heroes. Well I say that's nonsense. The Bible is simply the truth. And, the truth is that Abraham was at first a pagan; that the Hebrews were constantly struggling with idolatry and disobedience. It is truth that many of the worship practices of the Hebrews, as ordained by God, and PASSED ON TO WE BELIEVERS were similar in **outward** appearance to pagan worship practices that FAR pre-

dated the time of Moses.

So in the matter of the smoke, which is what set me off on this tangent in the first place, yes, the Hebrews DID envision God smelling the smoke and being pleased. Their real problem is that they just thought of the ritual sacrificial processes in a thoroughly physical, earthly sense (which, in general, was the way they viewed God) instead of the spiritual, heavenly sense that would slowly be revealed to man as we became able to embrace it. And, of course, it is that spiritual sense that Yeshua spends so much time explaining.

Let's read Chapter 3.

READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 3 all

Here we encounter yet a 3rd type of sacrifice, usually translated as the Peace Offering; and what we should take notice of, is that just like the first 2 kinds of sacrifices we've looked at, the 'Olah and the Minchah, this one as well has nothing to do with atoning for sins. That is, this is another offering to God that does not deal with direct trespasses against Yehoveh or the commission of bad behavior.....sins.

In Hebrew this offering is called the "Zevah Shelamim", or more often as simply the Zevah. And, not all scholars would translate these words to mean Peace Offering. Some of your Bibles translate it as the "offering of well-being", or the "offering of fellowship". Another, more recent, interpretation is "the sacred gift of greeting". Why the problem in translating this simple phrase "Zevah Shelamim"? Well, the root word of Shelamim....and remember, Hebrew is a language that operates by establishing a root word and then many variances and nuances are created from that root word....the root word is the SAME word from which we get the familiar Hebrew greeting, Shalom. And although most gentiles don't realize it, Shalom has a much broader and deeper meaning than "hello" or "how'ya do'in". Shalom carries with it the idea of being a gracious greeting, of being at peace, of possessing well being and of brotherly fellowship.....all at the same time. So none of these renderings of Zevah Shelamim that I've put forward are wrong.....its just that none by themselves is fully adequate to cover the name and meaning of this sacrifice. So, this is a "greeting, gift, fellowship, well-being, peace offering" to Yehoveh. Again, notice, this is NOT about dealing with some sin or another that the worshipper has committed. For the sake of simplicity, I'm choosing to call this particular sacrifice the Peace Offering.

Now this Peace Offering of Leviticus chapter 3 introduces us to a new class of offering: the Zevah. The Zevah is a lower class of offering than either the 'Olah or the Minchah; and this is reflected in the fact that in the Olah and the Minchah only the priests were permitted to use or benefit from any part of the sacrificial offering. In the 'Olah, the priests could keep the animal skin; in the Minchah the priests could keep the bulk of the grain offering as their own personal food; in fact they were **required** to eat that food within the courtyard of the Tabernacle, for it was considered a sacred meal.

The Zevah, the Peace Offering, class of sacrifice also was considered a sacred meal; however this sacred meal could be shared with the worshipper.....a non-priest. Therefore since a layman

could partake of it this was deemed a slightly less sacred sacrifice than the first two.

There are several similarities between the Zevah, (the Peace Offering) and the Olah (the burnt offering). Notice, for instance, that the practice of laying hands (semikhah as its called in Hebrew) on the designated sacrificial animal is called for in both cases. Remember that semikhah involved some sort of symbolic transference of guilt from the worshipper to the animal; the semikhah also indicated that THIS particular animal was designated by the worshipper as his sacrifice and that it was now God's property. Further, as with the 'Olah, the Peace Offering, the Zevah Shelamim, involves only animals (not plant life) and these animals offered are to be burned up on the Brazen Altar.

Yet there are also differences between the Zevah and the 'Olah; only certain PARTS of the animal are to be burned up in the Peace Offering. And the **kinds** of animals that may be sacrificed for a Zevah cannot include birds that **can** be sacrificed in the 'Olah. Further, as we'll see in later chapters, the highest level of perfection of the sacrificial animal is not as stringent in some types of the Zevah, but neither can it ever be a poor specimen. And, of course, key to the Peace Offering is that the worshipper.....non-priests.....may partake in the meat that is set aside and not burned up on the altar. Another key difference is that FEMALE animals may be used for Peace Offering, as well as male animals.

For the Zevah, the Peace Offering, Cattle, sheep and goats may be used. After being slaughtered, it is the FAT from the animal that surrounds the liver, kidneys, and entrails that is burned on the Altar. This particular kind of sacrificial fat is called in Hebrew, **Helev**.....and this type of animal fat it is NOT to be consumed by Israelites any more than the blood from an animal is to be consumed. However an animal's body contains a another and different KIND of fat; it is a layer of fat located just under the animal's skin, or adheres in other places to the animal's flesh. This kind of fat may NOT be used for the sacrifice.

Here is vs. 5 we run into the "problem" that I spent the first few minutes of our lesson discussing.....the one that hurts our sensibilities and messes with our minds a little. We're told that the Peace Offering (Zevah) is "turned into smoke", which is a "pleasing odor to Yehoveh". I don't want to belabor the point but notice that the clear PURPOSE of burning up the meat is so that it produces SMOKE, and the smoke carries with it an odor that is meant to satisfy God.

We're next told that if a sheep is offered as the Peace Offering, that in addition to the fat that surrounds those specified internal organs, the fat extracted from the sheep's tail is to be used. Now this does **not** include the tail from every kind of sheep; there was a special variety of sheep that was greatly favored by the Hebrews (as well as other Middle Eastern cultures in that era) and it was called the "fat-tailed sheep". It was the fat from the tail from this particular species that was being called for.

In vs. 12 a goat is named as an authorized Peace Offering. This surprises some folks because they think that in the NT when the returning Messiah speaks of separating the goats from the sheep that some how or another goats must be, in all circumstances, considered something that symbolizes uncleanness or evil. In fact goats were prime sacrificial animals as they were

generally heartier and more prolific than sheep. They were perfectly acceptable sacrifices to Yehoveh. Yet, they did hold a slightly lower status than sheep, and at times (like in the separation of goats from sheep) they are considered negative. Like leaven, yeast, in food, which could be both positive and negative depending on its use, goats can also be seen to represent both sides of the coin.

Now vs. 17 gives us some important information. First, it tells us this is a law regarding the **Helev**, the acceptable kind of sacrificial animal FAT, AND it also concerns animal blood. Second, it gives us the statute of limitations on this law....that is, just **how long** this law is to be in effect. It states unequivocally, that it is for all time. And, third, it explains WHERE this law is in effect. Basically, the “where” is anywhere a Jew resides (it goes without further comment that this includes the Tabernacle). In other words, so far in Leviticus the instructions given have had to do with what happens ONLY in the Tabernacle. Now the aspect concerning the eating of fat and blood is extended to everywhere the Hebrews settle.....wherever they are this law is in effect.

So what is the PURPOSE of the Peace Offering (beyond, of course, emitting the all-important fragrant smoke)? Leviticus 7, which we'll get to in a few weeks, gives us 3 reasons the Peace Offering should be brought before the Lord: 1) as a “confession offering”, 2) as a “free-will offering”, and 3) as a “vow offering”. What we see is that the Peace Offering was a sacrificial offering to be used for special occasions; it was not a regular daily offering, like the 'Olah and the Minchah. The Zevah was at the discretion of the worshipper. Well, we've already discussed that the Zevah is a gift of greeting to the Lord, it is a gift of peace, and it is a plea for well-being to God Almighty. It is also a request for fellowship with the Father, which ties in with the 'Olah and Minchah sacrifices. That is, all of these first 3 sacrifices are meant to maintain a peaceful relationship with God, to demonstrate obedience and loyalty to Him, and to gain PERSONAL acceptance by Him. It also demonstrates that the worshipper recognizes that it is this personal acceptance by God that gives the worshipper Shalom; peace and well-being.

Let me put this in perspective and it is a point that is awfully easy to lose track of: all of these sacrifices and all of the rituals and all of the laws are ONLY meant for redeemed people. None of these sacrifices, rituals, and following of the Law brought redemption. Rather it was that God FIRST redeemed Israel, and then He gave them the laws and rituals needed for those redeemed people to repair and maintain their relationship with God. It was no different for the people of Torah than it is for Believers today. Just as Moses' flock didn't perform sacrifices to obtain redemption, it had been a free gift from God, so it is with us that God gives us redemption as a free gift (through Messiah) and then goes about explaining to us how to keep and maintain a right relationship with Him.

I was at a church in Casselberry, Florida some time back for a special function, and at a dinner put on by the church I was visiting a young boy, about 10 years old, was called on to say grace for the whole group. His prayer was short and profound. After thanking God for our meal, he said “God, make me obedient so that I can live a good life”. That is probably the best summation for the meaning of the Peace Offering that anyone could ever offer.

Now, let's take a look at each of the 3 stated occasions for the giving of the Peace offering,

the Zevah. The first occasion, the “confession offering”, was used when the worshipper sought God for deliverance from his enemies or for healing from sickness. Since some unknown sin was often seen as the cause for oppression from an enemy or for becoming ill, it was logical that the confession of sin was necessary if he thought that was the reason for his predicament. Now it goes without saying that these sins would have been of the unintentional variety, because they were unknown to the worshipper. But in reality this was more about seeking God’s mercy upon the sinful CONDITION of the worshipper rather than for acts of misbehavior. Acts of misbehavior were dealt with by means of other kinds of sacrifices that we’ve yet to study. To get an example of the practical use of the Peace Offering (the Zevah) in Israelite life, turn your Bible to Judges 20:24-28. Then, we’ll also look at Judges 21:1-4.

READ JUDGES 20:24-28, AND JUDGES 21:1-4

In these two cases the Israelites were perplexed by what was happening to them so they first offered the ‘Olah, which is designed to gain God’s attention and favor; and next the Peace Offering, as a confession offering....a confession of their sinful condition and unworthiness.

Let’s look now at a second and different type of Peace Offering called the “vow offering”. It was typical in that day to make a vow to God that if He helped you out of some kind of problem, or would show His mercy to you for a special need, you would pledge to do something for God in return. When that pledge, that vow, to God was fulfilled it would be capped off with ceremony that included a Peace Offering.

The essence of this kind of Zevah, this “vow offering”, is illustrated well in the story of Jacob fleeing his brother Esau after he tricked him and obtained the firstborn birthright from their father, Isaac, that rightly, by tradition, belonged to Esau. We’re going to look first at Genesis 28:16-22, and then Genesis 35:1-4, 13-15.

READ GEN 28:16 - 22

READ GEN 35:1-4 AND 13-15

If you’ll recall the beginning of our lesson today, I explained that God had long ago put His principles into practice....well before Moses and the Law....but they had become degraded and corrupted to varying degrees by the hundreds and hundreds of cultures now in existence. Here we have Jacob, some 500 years before Moses was given the Law, performing a Zevah type of offering....all the elements of the Zevah, the Peace Offering, are present.

The standing-stone Jacob erected is in Hebrew, Matstsebah, which can indicate a pillar of some kind, used as a marker, or a very primitive type of altar. Obviously, since Jacob is using it as a place of offering to Yehoveh, it was more of an altar than a boundary marker.

And the story shows the vow made by Jacob (if you’ll help me, you will be my God), and then many years later when Jacob has fulfilled his vow by making Yehoveh his God, he erects a

Matstsebah, and sacrifices oil to God on it as “the vow offering”. The Vow Offering prescribed in such detail to Moses in Leviticus 3, was given 5 centuries after this incident with Jacob that we find in Genesis; and even though the principles and the essence of the Vow Offering are the same, God has refined and defined it further since the time of Jacob when Jacob did what was customary in the region for his era. When Jacob set up the standing stone, made a vow, and offered a sacrifice of oil, he wasn’t ad lib-ing; he wasn’t inventing something new.....what he did was customary and typical for his day not just among the Hebrews, but among most of the Middle Eastern peoples.

The third kind of Peace Offering is often called the “free-will offering”. It was quite different from the “vow and confession” kinds of Peace offerings in that with the free-will offering the worshipper was not seeking something from God; rather, this was simply a spontaneous expression of gratitude **to** Yehoveh. It was quite a joyful occasion.

All 3 types of Peace Offerings (Zevah) ended with a sacred meal, typically involving both the worshipper and the priests. All 3 types of Peace Offerings were, in general, joyous in nature, although the free-will offering was the MOST joyous.

Now lest we think that the use by Hebrews of the typical, even pagan-like, cultural religious expressions of that era even went so far as to imply that when the Israelites were enjoying their sacred meal in God’s presence, that indeed God TOO was eating food, we have only to look at Psalm 50:12, 13. It says this: (this is God speaking) ***“If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?”***

What we should take from this Psalm is that 1) the pagan mindset of Hebrews even in the era of David (300 years after Moses) at times must have actually viewed Yehoveh as eating food (or God would not have scolded the Hebrews about it). They still envisioned Him in the cultural way that all Middle Easterners typically did all of their gods.....as a kind of super-humans with all sorts of physical, human-like qualities and needs. And 2), God was making it quite clear that He does not have human-like needs, and no, He does not eat or drink. Therefore the ultimate meaning of His instructions, such as here in Leviticus, whereby it speaks of the smoke being a lovely fragrance to God’s nostrils, is not physical, but spiritual in it’s meaning. God does NOT have nostrils, nor does He “smell” the smoke the way we humans think of it. All of the scores, perhaps hundreds, of times in the Bible that we are told of God weeping, or shouting, or brandishing a sword, or running after someone, etc., are figurative. Yet if Yehoveh is going to communicate with mankind He is always going to have to dumb it down and use terms that a man can identify with and understand.

One final thing and we’ll end: we will not find the term “Peace Offering” or Zevah in the NT; primarily because the only manuscripts we have are in Greek, not Hebrew. Because “Zevah” is a Hebrew concept, there is no equivalent Greek word. However we have obvious references to various forms of the Zevah sacrifices. Usually all the terms for the many different kinds of sacrifices we are in the midst of learning about are lumped into one all-encompassing word.....sacrifice. But the various types of sacrifices are still identifiable in the NT due to the occasions and the procedures. For instance, in Acts when Paul “paid for” the offerings of the 4

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men who had taken the vow of a Nazarite, what he was paying for was the sacrificial animals necessary to perform the “vow offering” type of Peace offering. When we’re done studying Leviticus, as you read the NT you’ll find yourself recognizing the various kinds of sacrificial offerings being performed.