



Leviticus and Yeshua

Further Thoughts on Parashat Vayikra

The Book of Leviticus (i.e., *Vayikra*: וַיִּקְרָא) is to the Torah what the Book of Hebrews is to the New Testament. Leviticus is both the physical and spiritual center of the Five Books of Moses and comprises its ritual expression. The sages count 246 of the 613 commandments of the Torah in this book -- over 40% -- and many of the Talmud's discussions regarding ritual purity and holiness are based on it.

Many Christian readers of the Bible want to *skip* the Book of Leviticus, however, because they find the detailed description of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the various laws of the sacrificial system to be tedious and/or irrelevant for followers of Yeshua. This is unfortunate because in its pages the great sacrificial work of Yeshua is foreshadowed and explained for us. Indeed, without the underlying concepts "seeded" there, various fundamental New Testament teachings concerning the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua for our sins, our justification by faith, and our call to walk in sanctification would not make much sense....

The LORD intended that the sacrificial laws given to the Levitical priests (i.e., *kohanim*) would *foreshadow* the coming atoning sacrifice offered by Yeshua, the "Lamb of God slain from the foundation (יסוד) of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19-20, Rev. 13:8). This is why these laws are called *torat Kohanim* - the "teaching of the priests." This *instruction* (i.e., *torah*: תּוֹרָה) was intended for all Israel to understand the need for blood atonement in order to draw near to God (Lev. 17:11). The Levitical system as a whole served as a "type" or "picture" of heavenly realities. Moses received the "pattern" (i.e., *tavnit*: תַּבְנִית) of the Throne of God on Sinai, but this was a physical copy or "shadow" of the spiritual Reality he beheld in visions. The Mishkan was always intended to be moved into the Promised Land, which King David later established in Zion, the place of the Holy Temple. But it was the sacrificial death of Yeshua that is the focal point and goal of it all: Yeshua is the Substance of all that the sacrifices foreshadowed...

Unlike narrative portions of the other books of the Torah, the Book of Leviticus begins as a *direct message* from God to Moses, "calling out" the way to draw close to the LORD by means of the sacrificial system. In fact the word *korban* (קָרְבָּן), often translated as "sacrifice" or "offering," comes from a root (קָרַב) that means to "draw close" or "to come near." In this connection it should be noted that the various sacrifices were intended to



help *us* draw near to God, but not for God to draw near to us. God doesn't "need" sacrifices nor were they intended to somehow "bribe" or influence Him. God gave us sacrifices -- and *especially* the sacrifice of Yeshua -- for *our* benefit, so that we could draw close to Him. But apart from faith and genuine repentance, the sacrifices themselves were of no effect. Therefore the prophets later denounced insincere offerings made at the Temple as a vain show that were useless to draw us near to God (Amos 5:22-24). In other words, without a genuine heart response to God's gracious love, the mere idea of sacrifice does us little good.

Throughout the Book of Leviticus, only the name of the L-rd (יהוה) is used in connection with sacrificial offerings, never the name *Elohim* (אלהים). This suggests that offerings were given to draw us near to experience God's compassion rather than to appease His anger. In other words, apart from the LORD's infinite love and compassion, *no sacrifice* would ever be accepted, because God's role as the Righteous Judge would immediately execute any sinner who approached Him....

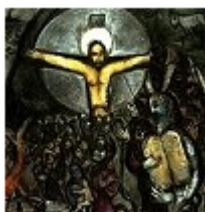
It has been noted that there were no prescriptions of words to be spoken during the *semikhah/shechitah* ceremony (i.e., sacrificial ceremony), no formulas or ritualized prayers. The sacrifice was performed in silence. The worshipper would firmly lay both hands on the head of the sacrificial victim and reflect that this animal's fate should really be his -- i.e., that he deserved to die for his sin. Only because of the LORD's mercy was this animal accepted in his place, and therefore the sacrificial rite was ultimately one of healing and restoration... This is the "korban" principle of "life-for-life." When the LORD saw the shed blood and ascending smoke of the sacrifice, He forgave the sinner based on his faith and *teshuvah* (repentance). The "sweet savor" (i.e., *re'ach nicho'ach*: רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ) of the sacrifice refers to the *future* life (and healing) of the worshipper -- *not* the sacrifice itself. By itself -- apart from genuine repentance -- the sacrifice holds no power to forgive sin, and indeed, forgiveness is a *relational* concept (Matt. 5:24, 6:12, Isa. 1:11, etc.). In the Levitical system, the offering of a sacrifice served as a "symbol and expression of man's desire to purify himself and become reconciled to God" (Leibowitz, Vayikra).

The Torah states that three parts of the sacrificial animal must *always* be burned: the fat (חֵלֶב), the kidneys (כִּלְיֵה), and the lobe of the liver (כִּבְדָּה). The fat symbolizes luxury or the "rise" of the flesh (and is therefore somewhat analogous to *chametz* (leaven) that is forbidden during Passover). The kidneys are thought to be the source of carnal emotions, while the liver is thought to be the source of anger and pride. All three are completely burned on the altar as a sign that the inner parts of the "flesh" must be entirely destroyed. The blood is never to be consumed, since the "life is in the blood" and is reserved to make atonement upon the altar (Lev. 17:11).



With the fulfillment of God's salvation by the sacrificial death and resurrection of Yeshua (Gen. 3:14-16, Isa. 53, etc.), and with the destruction of the Second Temple according to His prophecy (Matt. 24:1-2), the system and priesthood of the Levites was no longer needed (Heb. 8-10). Yeshua is forever our great High Priest who has entered into the true and heavenly Temple "made without hands" and there presented His blood upon the "mercy seat" (i.e., *kapporet*: כַּפֹּרֶת) before the throne of God on our behalf. Yeshua now intercedes for us, drawing us near to God (Heb. 7:25, 8:1-2). He is our Righteous Advocate (παράκλητος, lit. "one called alongside") who stands by our side in the heavenly courtroom, making appeal for mercy and grace on our behalf and commending us before God (1 John 2:1).

It is interesting to note that the word in the ancient Greek translation of the Torah (called the Septuagint) that was selected to translate the Hebrew word *kapporet* ("mercy seat") is *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον), often translated "propitiation." The New Testament picks up this usage in Romans 3:25: "God put forward Yeshua as a *propitiation* (ἱλαστήριον) through faith in His blood." In other words, the sprinkling of Yeshua's blood - represented by His Passion upon the cross - was "presented" upon the Heavenly Kapporet, before the very Throne of God Himself. Yeshua here functions as the great High Priest after the order of *Malki-Tzedek* (i.e., Melchizedek) who provides everlasting forgiveness for our sins (Heb. 9:7-10:10). Because of His sacrifice, the *parochet* - the wall-like covering separating the Holy of Holies - was rent asunder and God's love was let loose upon the world! Those who trust in Yeshua as their atoning sacrifice before God (i.e., *kapparah*: כַּפָּרָה) are able to draw near to God full of confidence.



In Jewish tradition, the Book of Leviticus (Vayikra) is always read during the Season of Passover, a holiday that foreshadows the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Because of Yeshua - the true Lamb of God - we can now draw near to the Throne of Grace to find help in time of our need (Heb. 4:16). Even more - we can hope to experience "at-one-ment" with the LORD God of Israel Himself because of Yeshua's intercession and love for us (John 17:22).

Blessed be His Name forever.