

Leviticus

Lesson 1

Preface

Here in America, we basically know the laws of the land. But most of us really do not know the laws that are on our nations books. The one set of laws that we do know are those that we were forced to learn in order to obtain our driver's license. Do this, do that, turn like this, turn like that, park here, park there, we all know those laws whether or not we observe them. After the Exodus of the nation of Israel out of Egypt, under the direction of Moses, the LORD gave His divine laws to His chosen, select, and even as Paul and Peter called them "elect" people. Those laws did not apply to all the people on the earth; they were specifically for the guidance of the bloodline of the Nation of Israel all the way to the arrival of their Messiah, Who, during His ministry here on earth, would fill up those laws with additional instructions. Those changes by Jesus were for the Israelites, but, as prophesied, Israel's leadership would rejected Jesus and lead the people astray from their true Messiah. Jesus then, as prophesied, opened the doors to the Gentiles of the world in the prophesied mystery called the Church. The fulfilled Laws would then apply to all people of all nations who would believe in Him as the Messiah and Savior for all generations.

Living in America, several thousand years after the giving of those Levitical laws to people of the Nation of Israel, enlightened by Israel's Messiah Whom we know as Jesus, the One Whom they rejected, and Whom we serve in His Church with a new direction and enhanced message, we struggle with information found in this third book of the Bible. It seems so foreign to us. So unnecessary. So confusing. Yet, to the Israelites, as they would soon leave Mount Sinai to claim the Promised Land, it was not foreign, unnecessary or confusing. It was the foundation of their legal system as the Nation of Israel. Whether or not they liked it, it was still their laws to obey or disobey. What we miss by not knowing the laws in this book is its importance in the context of every passage that follows in the Bible. Because we have all sixty-six, independent witnesses in the Holy Bible, we have the fortunate ability to see in its pages examples of the fulfillment of each letter and intent of those laws. The Jews knew those laws because they lived by them and they understood why certain stories in the Bible turned out the way they did. For example, there was a young man born of the priestly line of Aaron who was set to be the high priest in his father's place one day. His father was the current high priest at the time. But in his teenage years he disqualified himself from ever serving as a priest at any level and he ended up as the commander of the body guard of King David. The text in 2 Samuel 11 tells us what he had done in his early years; the text in Leviticus 21:1-4 tells us why his teenage deeds had forfeited eternally his right to be the high priest one day. You see, anyone in the priestly line could not become the high priest if he had touched a dead human, with the exception of his mother, father, wife, male son or unmarried daughter or anything with paws. The young man had disqualified himself in his teenage years by killing two Moabite men, and Egyptian man and a lion. Not knowing the law, we miss that point when reading through 2 Samuel. Knowing the law sheds great light on the true context of the passage. And so it is with every story in the rest of the Bible that comes after this book. We will find many classic examples in the Bible as we study together this interesting book of Israel's laws and discover the reasons the Israelites did what they did and will do what they do throughout all the generations.

What is the purpose of this study? It is to make this seemingly difficult book easy to understand so that its content will open up the true context and intent found in the rest of God's Word.

Chapter 1

I. The Timing of the Law (1:1)

The book begins with, *“Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,”* (1:1).

In those words we have the timing, and, yet, how many of us have missed it as we pass by this written real estate in our yearly read through the Bible. The book of Exodus sets the stage for this first verse to be written. You see, there was no “tent of meeting” for the Nation of Israel until they had constructed it under the direction of Moses by the instruction of the LORD in the last half of their first year out of Egypt. Just after the first anniversary of leaving Egypt, on Nisan 15th, the whole nation would pack up and leave Mount Sinai and arrive at Kadesh-barnea about three months later where twelve spies would be sent to investigate the Promised Land and bring back a report. But before leaving Mount Sinai for Kadesh-barnea, the books of Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus would be completed and in the care of the nation, to be carried along with the Tabernacle and all its furniture and fixtures. The Tabernacle was constructed in the last half of the first year and that Tabernacle was also called “the tent of meeting.” The construction of this Tabernacle or tent took some time to complete. It was after the tent was complete but before the nation left to spy out the Promised Land that the LORD gave to Moses the laws recorded in this book. These words were not given to Moses on Mount Sinai but in the tent of meeting after the LORD had moved from the top of the mount to live within the tent of meeting or Tabernacle where He rested above the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant behind the Veil.

II. The Requirements of the Offerings (1:2-)

A. The Source of the Offering (1:2)

Continuing on in verse 2 of chapter 1, the LORD said to Moses, *“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock...’”* (1:2).

In this second verse we hit head on the first reason for the book of Leviticus but we also hit on a point that has been difficult to understand for many generations in the past caused by its translation into the English language. In this version we read *“your offering of animals from the herd or the flock...”* Unbeknown to most readers, there are four words in that phrase that might cause confusion in rendering a true interpretation of the intended meaning.

Throughout this commentary, four English Bible translations will be mentioned often to bring clarity to the interpretation and understanding of the LORD’s intent. Here is an overview of the four English Bibles that will be mentioned often.

The Wycliffe Bible – AD 1380: Most of you have heard of the Wycliffe Bible Translation organization. Its name is drawn from John Wycliffe who was an English theologian and a seminary professor at University of Oxford who was the first to produce a translation of the Bible for English speaking people. His translation was produced in Middle English. His translation was not from the original Hebrew but from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate that was commissioned by the Church in 382 AD. Wycliffe was a master of the English and Latin languages at the time and used his Middle English words that most closely matched the meaning of the Latin words. Nevertheless, it was a very good translation and has been found to be extremely faithful to the original Hebrew even though Wycliffe was not a master of the Hebrew language. This faithfulness was in part because Jerome was a master of the Hebrew as well as the Latin; therefore, because his translation of the Vulgate was faithful to the original meaning of the text, so, too, Wycliffe’s translation was faithful to the original text. He

began the translation in August of 1380 and completed it in the summer of 1381. His English version caused a great rift with the Catholic Church which did not accept his translation. It was his desire to provide a translation that the poor preachers could use to take the Bible truth to the English people. Wycliffe suffered a stroke while saying Mass on December 28th, 1384 and died on December 31, 1384 in Lutterworth, Leicestershire. In the years after his death, Wycliffe's followers were persecuted by the Church. In 1408, the "Constitutions of Oxford" banned some of Wycliffe's writings and proclaimed that his Bible translation was unlicensed by the Church and a crime punishable by the charges of heresy. On May 4, 1415, the Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic and banned all his writings as well as posthumously excommunicating him and his dead remains from the Church. The council also decreed that his remains should be removed from the consecrated ground in which he was buried and be burned. In 1428, Pope Martin V agreed. Wycliffe's bones were exhumed, burned and the ashes cast into the River Swift. Nonetheless, Wycliffe's Middle English work has stood the test of time being found faithful to the original Word of God.

The Tyndale's Bible – AD 1526: William Tyndale, also known as William Hychyns, completed his BA in 1496 and his MA in 1512 at Oxford University. He then went on to study at the University of Cambridge where Erasmus had been the teacher of Greek from August 1511 to January 1512. Even though Erasmus left the university the year Tyndale arrived, Erasmus was a great influence on Tyndale. Tyndale was a fluent linguist in English, Latin, Spanish, German, Italian, Hebrew, French and Greek. As you might tell from the dates of Tyndale's life, the reformation from the Catholic church was in full swing and at one point Tyndale had a great argument with the leaders of the Church in Gloucestershire. He felt that the church leaders were blasphemous in regards to the Scripture and according to John Foxe, Tyndale said, "I defy the Pope, and all his laws; and if God spares my life, ere many years, I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost!"¹ In 1523, Tyndale arrived in London expecting to secure approval to translate the Greek and Hebrew Bible into English. Permission was not granted. In the spring of 1524, Tyndale traveled to Europe and registered at the University of Wittenberg under the name "Guilleimus Daitici ex Anglia" which is accepted to be "William Tyndale from England." By 1525, Tyndale had completed the translation of the Greek New Testament into English with the help of William Roy. It was published in 1526 but condemned by the Catholic Church in October 1526 by Bishop Tunstall who ordered all copies to be burned in public. After that, Tyndale moved to Hamburg where he began translating the Hebrew Old Testament into English. He published Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy in 1530 and Jonah in 1531. His work continued with the help of Miles Coverdale and John Rogers; however, in 1536, Tyndale was condemned for his heresy under the king of England's command. In the early days of October 1536, Tyndale was strangled to death while tied to a stake and his death body was burned. It is interesting that by 1540, just four years after his death, Tyndale's translation, including the completed Bible under the work of Coverdale and Rogers was published in England under the order of the new king. King Henry's official Great Bible was based on Tyndale's work. Just about 84% of every modern translation today relies on Tyndale's work. It, like Wycliffe's work, is faithful to the original Scripture. Tyndale's work was in Modern English and helps show the progression of English words and definitions that faithfully reflect the original meanings. It is for that reason that

¹ [Foxe, John \(1926\) \[1563\]. "Ch. XII".](#) In Forbush, William Byron (ed.). [The Book of Martyrs](#). New York: Holt, Rinehart And Winston.

we want and need to look at the words he used in his translation as we search for the true meaning of God's Word in our study.

The King James Version – AD 1611: King James VI was the king of Scotland. In 1601 he attended a general assembly of the Church of Scotland in Burnisland, Fife where he heard a proposal to produce a new English Bible that followed the rhyme and cadence of the popular Shakespearean English of the Day. By 1604, King James had become the King of England and he ordered a conference called the *Hampton Court* in that year for the purpose of commissioning a new translation for the Church to answer the problems put forth by the Puritans in the Church of England with some of the words used in previous English Bibles. A committee of fifty four scholars were tasked with the job and these men were divided into six committees, two committees each based at Westminster, Cambridge and Oxford. The text for their work was based on the Bishops Bible which was a revised version of previous English works by Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew's Bible, the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible. It was not an original translation. Forty two copies of the Bishops Bible were produced and given to the committees to use and make changes and notes in the margins. Their work was completed by January 1609 and a committee began to review all the changes and produced one harmonized copy of the entire Bible. The Bible was not originally called the King James Version, it was called the Authorized Version because it was authorized by King James, not God. Robert Barker was the king's printer and he began printing and selling the version in 1611. You could buy the entire Bible loose-leaf for ten shillings or bound together for twelve.

The original King James Version is hard to read because the English alphabet and spellings were not yet standardized in the move from Middle English. A “v” was used for a “u” and in other places a “u” was used for a “v.” An example is the name *David* which was spelled *Dauid*. The “ff” was used for the “s” sound. All of this was corrected by 1769 when the Modern English alphabet and spellings were standardized. Here is an example from 1 Corinthians 13.

KJV 1611 - ¹ Though I speake with the tongues of men & of Angels, and haue not charity, I am become as sounding brasse or a tinkling cymbal. ² And though I haue the gift of prophesie, and vnderstand all mysteries and all knowledge: and though I haue all faith, so that I could remooue mountaines, and haue no charitie, I am nothing.

KJV 1769 - ¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ² And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

Note that in the second verse of the KJV 1769 example the words *the gift of* are in italics. This change was to indicate that these three words were not found in the original text of the Greek but added by the scholars to help with the translation interpretation. It is a grave mistake because it interjects the theology of the revision scholars on the committee rather than allowing the original text to speak. For example, prophecy is not a gift. This prophecy is not the ability to tell the future, it is the ability to speak, if nothing more than to read aloud the Word of God and let it speak to the heart of the hearer. It is the telling of what has been said previously and record in God's Word, not speaking some new Word from God that is not already in His Holy Writ.

The New American Standard Version – AD 1963 New Testament, AD 1971 Old Testament: By the middle 1900's, it was evident that American English was different from England English. Although we used many of the same words in America and England, the definitions of those words were different. The King James Version of England was becoming extremely difficult to use and to grasp the true intent of God's Word. Here is a quick example.

KJV 1769: 1 Thessalonians 4:15 - For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep

NASV 1963: 1 Thessalonians 4:15 - For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Note that in England in 1769, the word prevent meant pre – event or go – before. In other words, the KJV 1769 was saying “we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not go before them which are asleep. The NASV 1963 corrected that for Americans by saying “will not precede those.”

Throughout these lessons you will hear me reference these four English Bibles from time to time because the understanding of the history of our English word development will greatly help in understanding the words we need to use to thoroughly understand what words we should be using in translating the Hebrew text to English.

In our NASB version we read “*your offering of animals from the herd or the flock...*”

Wycliffe reads “... *a sacrifice of beasts, that is, of oxen and of sheep ...*”

Tyndale reads “...*bringe it of the catell: euen of the oxen and of the shepe.*” (... bring it of the cattel: even of the oxen and of the sheep...).

The KJV reads “...*your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.*”

Wycliffe used the words “beasts, oxen, sheep.” The NASV used the words “animals, herd, flock.” Tyndale used “cattle, oxen, sheep.” KJV used “cattle, herd, flock.” At first glance it seems that these are very different words with very different meanings – but are they?

Two groups of animals will be accepted by the LORD for His offering, those from the herd and the flock. But do not rush past these two groups too fast. To the Israelite living in the wilderness below Mount Sinai, these two groups of animals had great meaning. Why? Because the herd and the flock could mean only the animals that the Israelites took with them when they left Egypt just months before. Here we must ask the question, “What kind of animals did the Egyptians allow the Israelites to take with them when they left Egypt and why?”

First, the herd is a reference to the large bovine cows or oxen animals which are said to be kept in herds. The Smith Bible Dictionary says,

Throughout Bible history the oxen was clearly the most precious animal for the LORD’s people next to horse and mule. But the herd oxen provided the honored sacrifice in worship besides being the main stay used in daily life to plough the fields, and yield milk, butter and cheese. also flesh meat, and milk, chiefly converted, probably, into butter and cheese (Num. 7:3; Ps. 69:31; Isa. 66:3; Deut. 32:14; 2 Sam. 17:2). The agricultural and general usefulness of the ox in ploughing, threshing, and as a beast of burden, 1 Chron. 12:40; Isa. 46:1, made a slaughtering of him seem wasteful. Herdsman, etc., in Egypt were a low, perhaps the lowest, caste; but of the abundance of cattle in Egypt, and of the care there bestowed on them, there is no doubt. Gen. 47:6, 17; Ex. 9:4, 20. So the plague of hail was sent to smite especially the cattle, Ps. 78:48, the first-born of which also were smitten. Ex. 12:29. The Israelites departing stipulated for, Ex. 10:26, and took “much cattle” with them. ch. 12:38. Cattle formed thus one of the traditions of the Israelitish nation in its greatest period, and became almost a part of that greatness. The occupation of herdsman was honorable in early times. Gen. 47:6; 1 Sam. 11:5; 1 Chron. 27:29; 28:1. Saul himself resumed it in the interval of his cares as king; also Doeg was certainly high in his confidence. 1 Sam. 21:7. Pharaoh made some of Joseph’s brethren “rulers over his cattle.”

David's herdsmasters were among his chief officers of state. The prophet Amos at first followed this occupation.²

The oxen from the herd was the great offering that meant much when given because it was so vital to the occupation of sustaining life for every Jewish family.

Second, the flock. Sheep, goats and birds were raised in flocks and considered small animals. They were not raised in herds although, in the late 1500s, the English language began to refer to sheep and goats being kept in herds, but this was not the original mean of the Bible text. Flocks of doves were raised by the Jews for the meat, as well as fowl.

This initial introduction to the *burnt offering* means the oxen from the herd and the sheep, goat or dove from the flock was to be used. Let us look on in the text for the specific instruction for the *burnt offering*.

B. The Burnt Offering

1. From the Herd

a) Only a Male Bull Without Defect (1:3)

The LORD speaks, “*If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD*” (1:3).

(1) The Animal

First, at this point in the text, the LORD does not qualify the reason for the difference between the offering from the herd or the flock. He only says, “*If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, ...*” Therefore, the person making the offering has some say in what is to be offered and the LORD will accept it. However, there are two restrictions on this animal. It must be a male and it must be without defect.

(2) The Place

Second, the animal was to be led to the doorway of the tent of meeting. This was a very solemn and restricted place; only the priest were allowed in this area at any time of the day or night. Nevertheless, when a person brought a *burnt offering*, he was allowed into this area to make his atonement for sin. The doorway curtain to the tent of meeting always faced east. At a safe distance further east, the Altar sat which burned with fire continuously. A large wash basin was near the Altar. The person would bring his offering into the area between the front curtain door of the tent and the Altar. That was the only place the offering would be accepted by the LORD. The person was not allowed to go into the tent of meeting, that was the place for the priests. The person would stand with his offering outside the door.

(3) The Transfer (1:4)

The LORD continues, “*He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf*” (1:4). It is not the priest doing this, it is the person bringing the offering.

(4) The Sacrifice (1:5)

The LORD says, “*He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting*” (1:5). It is not the priest killing the animal, it is the person bringing the offering. The priest is there to catch some

² Smith, W. (1986). In *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

of the blood from the neck wound. The priest will then use his fingers to sprinkle some of that blood around the four sides of the Altar.

(5) The Process (1:6)

The LORD instructed the offeror to do the following. *“He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces”* (1:6). It is not the priest who skins and quarters the animal, it is the person who brings the animal. This process is done while the priest is sprinkling the blood around the Altar.

(6) The Fire (1:7)

The LORD then says, *“The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire”* (1:7). The fire at the Altar was continuous, but it was not always raging as was needed for the *burnt offering*. While the offeror skinned and quartered the animal, the priest stoked the fire in preparation for the animal parts to be placed on the grill of the Altar.

(7) The Placement (1:8)

“Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar” (1:8). The whole animal, except the skin would be place on the Altar to burn. The word “suet” used in this verse means the pure fat of the animal. At this point, no restrictions are placed on the use of the suet; it is to be burned. Later we will see a restriction placed on the suet in Leviticus chapter 3.

(8) The Particular (1:9)

But the LORD was particular about the handling of certain parts of the animal that were to be offered on the Altar. That is where the basin of water came into the ceremony. The LORD states, *“Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD”* (1:9).

With the presentation of the animal, the person making the offering placed his hand on the head of the animal to transfer the sins which he had committed to the animal as he was seeking forgiveness. He then killed the animal in a symbolic act of killing the old sin that was transferred in the act of worship. The washing of the inward parts of the animal as well of the legs was extremely important. It symbolized the washing of the inward parts of the person who offered the animal so that he could live forgiven of the sin that was once within him. The washing of the legs represented the manner in which the person who offered the animal would continue to walk after the ceremony, washed to walk in a newness of life from that day on.

2. From the Flock

a) A Male Sheep or Goat Without Defect (1:10-13)

Not everyone could afford to offer a large oxen for a burnt offering. In that case, the LORD allowed a smaller animal from the flock, specifically the sheep and the goat. Notice that the animal had to meet the same requirement as the oxen being a male sheep or goat without defect. The rest of the instruction from the LORD is the same as for the oxen. *“But if his offering is from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect. He shall slay it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD, and Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. He shall then cut it into its pieces with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. The entrails, however, and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD”* (1:10-13).

b) From the Birds (1:14-17)

But the LORD changed the plan when the offering was a bird. He says, *“But if his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering from the turtledoves or from young pigeons”* (1:14).

The turtle dove is a very innocent and beautiful bird. It is a clean bird, easy to keep in flocks at the home. The age of the turtle does not matter, it is always accepted by the LORD. The turtle dove is one kind of animal, the pigeon is another; although, both are in the dove family of animals. Pigeons grow much larger than turtle doves, but both are tasty and raise for their meat in the Jewish families. Young pigeons were wholly acceptable for the burnt offering of the poor person. Surely the poorest of the poor could afford a dove or pigeon for his offering.

(1) The Priest (1:15-17)

But with the offering of a turtle dove or young pigeon, it was not the person who brought the bird who killed it, it was the priest. The LORD instructed the priest as follows.

“The priest shall bring it to the altar, and wring off its head and offer it up in smoke on the altar; and its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar. He shall also take away its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar eastward, to the place of the ashes. Then he shall tear it by its wings, but shall not sever it. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the wood which is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD” (1:15-17).

The priest was to wring the head off the animal and its was offered with the body on the Altar. However, the priest had to first cast away the “crop,” filled with grain, found under the neck of the bird as well as all its feathers. These were cast on the east side of the Altar, far away from the tent of meeting. The wings were torn, not cut, but place on the Altar with the rest.

(2) The Aroma

In all cases, with the animal from the herd or the flock, the animal was totally consumed by the fire, save for the skin of the oxen, sheep or goat which we will later learn will be given to the priest on duty. The LORD says about this total consumption of the animal, “*it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD*” (1:9, 13,17). It was a sweet aroma, an acceptable odor, a sweet smelling savor that pleased the LORD. A total sacrifice to the LORD for the atonement of sin.

In the next lesson we will discover the introduction to the grain offering found in Leviticus.