

Leviticus 1vs1-3

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2021

The Book of Leviticus gets its name in English from the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate referring to the priestly tribe of Levi. Much of the material deals with laws and regulations pertaining to the worship within the Mishkan, the Tabernacle and later transferred to the Temple. I personally think it's the best book in the Bible. Genesis describes God as a creator and how he works with families, Exodus tells us that God is a redeemer and a lawgiver. But only Leviticus tells us that God is holy. For young Jewish boys, this is the first book of the Bible that they begin to study.

Shimshon explained the chiasmic structure of the book. A chiasm is a literary device that sees sequences and patterns in thoughts, subjects and teachings in the overview of the text, often in repeated and reverse form. For example, a simple chiasm from Jesus would be, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. The centre of the chiasm in Leviticus is chapter 19, and this becomes the spiritual constitution for the Torah.

Leviticus opens with God calling (Va'Yikra) Moses and then God speaks (Va'Yedaber) to Moses who then speaks (Ya'Amor) to the Israelites. There are three different verbs to speak in these first two verses. Why does God call Moses? Why not simply speak to Moses and why does God not call Aaron? Leviticus is a calling, and yes it has rules and obligations, commands and statutes. But first and foremost the walk of faith and obedience is a calling. The first thing we must answer is the call.

God calls Moses from the Tent of Meeting. The words 'Ohel Mo'ed' can mean, among other things, the appointed tent or the tent of witness. Some translations also call it the tent of the presence. It is not called the Mishkan, the term usually referring to the tabernacle which was commanded to be constructed in Exodus. We discussed whether the Tent of Meeting was indeed the Mishkan or some other structure. What other structure could it be? According to Exodus 33vs7-11, there apparently was another tent called the Tent of Meeting that was placed outside the Israelite camp. Whether this tent was in operation during the construction of the Mishkan, which took 9 months to build, or served concurrent to the Mishkan is unclear. The presence of the Lord resided in the Mishkan, and Moses would meet the Lord standing before the curtain of separation. In the Tent of Meeting, it was Moses who resided in the tent with Joshua, and the Lord would stand outside the Tent at the entrance (essentially the other way around from the Mishkan!) Interestingly, Aaron was not mentioned as being in the Tent of Meeting. The point is the term 'Tent of Meeting' migrated from one structure to the other. That is, the Mishkan later became known as the Tent of Meeting. We see this migration of terms later as the Temple, which was a real structure in history, becomes applied to the physical bodies of the believers. We are now the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The first thing spoken to the Israelites in Leviticus relates to the Israelites bringing a sacrifice to the Lord. Sacrifice in Hebrew is korban and comes from the verb 'to draw close to'. Part of the calling we receive from the Lord is to draw close to Him. Animal sacrifices are not an easy thing to understand in our modern world. No reason in the first verses is given for why you would bring an animal offering at all. Animals die all the time and in huge numbers on a daily basis to satisfy the hunger of many people, vegetarians excluded. So the question pondered is this - If killing a cow for me is good why is killing a cow for God bad? Worship in the Bible always revolves around food. It was the tradition that the worshipper ate their own sacrifice. Sacrifices were not always meant to be sombre occasions. The purpose of the Tabernacle and Temple was to be a place where you 'feast in the presence of the Lord and rejoice with your household' (Deut

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14:26). Food really does have a big part to play in the worship of God. This is reflected in the Eucharist, which means ‘Thanksgiving’, the Sacrament of Bread and Wine in traditional churches to this day.

Verse 3 introduces another aspect of the sacrifice, now called a burnt offering, or ‘Olah’. That is, the verse starts with the conditional question word ‘If’. This implies free will and the Olah is not brought by compulsion. Interestingly, fish are never brought as sacrifices, only livestock. The burnt offering is then presented at the entrance to the mysterious Tent of Meeting, which we assume by this stage has migrated to mean the Tabernacle in the centre of the Israelite camp with Aaron now acting as High Priest. Remember that this encounter of worshipper and God at the Tent of Meeting is the worshipper’s response to the calling by God to be drawn into a closer relationship with God.