

TORAHSCOPE: Vayikra (And he called)

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Leviticus 11:5-26[6:7]
Isaiah 43:21-44:23

“Sacrificial Understanding”

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD's holy things, then he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD: a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, in *terms of* the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. He shall make restitution for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, and shall add to it a fifth part of it and give it to the priest. The priest shall then make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and it will be forgiven him. Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment. He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know *it*, and it will be forgiven him. It is a guilt offering; he was certainly guilty before the LORD” (Leviticus 5:14-19).

As we begin to examine the Book of Leviticus, the Torah student gets an opportunity to study the sacrificial system that was instituted by the Lord to cover the transgressions of His people. The Israelites have just completed the construction of the Tabernacle, and have witnessed His glory descend upon it. It is recorded that the weight (Heb. *kavod*, כְּבוֹד) of His presence was so intense that Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting in order to communicate directly with the Almighty:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34-35).

There is little doubt that at that point in time, Moses' credibility with the Israelites was at its pinnacle. Moses' revealed God's instructions on how to build the Tabernacle and all of its accoutrements, and they were followed to precision. The result had to be an awesome sight to these former Egyptian slaves, who were privileged to participate in the construction projects. From a distance they were all eyewitnesses to the pillars of fire and cloud that were guiding them by night and day, but now the manifestation of God's presence was preventing access to the awesome structure.

It is at this point that Moses describes the sacrificial system that he is given directly from God in the Tent of Meeting. Without any significant interruption in the text, it appears that the Lord, from His new location in the midst of Israel, begins to address the need for the individual atonement of the sins of the people:

“Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ‘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.” 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. 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.” 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” (Leviticus 1:1-4).

In these opening verses of Leviticus, we discover that the sacrifices for transgressions are intended to be quite personal. The one who is guilty of sin is instructed to place his hands on the head of the animal that has been chosen from the herd on which the sin guilt will be transferred. The individual is told that “He is to slaughter the young bull before the LORD” (Leviticus 1:5,

NIV), and then Aaron and his sons are to take the blood and offer and sprinkle it in the appropriate places. Can you imagine the impact this ceremony would have on you if you were required to participate in this ritual? If you have ever slaughtered an animal—which the great majority of modern-day people have never done—you might have some understanding of the significance of what was mandatory. But can you visualize actually placing your hands on an innocent animal’s head with the knowledge that your sin has required a blood atonement for you to be restored to a right relationship with God?

Many of these thoughts are difficult to fathom, but as you read through Leviticus, the variety of offerings and their significance for the array of sins of commission and sins of omission, can be overwhelming. It is understandable that many, especially in the nearly two thousand years since the Second Temple was destroyed in Jerusalem, have had a tendency to not really comprehend what is being communicated in passages such as these. Since Yeshua’s atoning work for us at Golgotha (Calvary), the propensity to focus on His atoning work has justifiably outweighed the study of the Book of Leviticus in most Christian teaching. As a result, the ability to personalize the gravity of sin and what was required to restore a right relationship with God, has been largely mitigated. Many Believers simply claim the “blood of Yeshua” when they transgress the Father’s will—if they are even aware of what it is—resulting in very little, if any, spiritual growth toward maturity.

This is one of the primary reasons that the Lord today has convicted many Believers to return to a consistent study of the Torah. By actually reading through this Torah portion, *Vayikra*, and meditating upon some or all of the sins that require atonement, one should be able to analyze areas of his or her life where some “fine tuning” would be appropriate. Who among us is *not* personally guilty of various sins of commission or omission at times? Even the beloved Apostle John recognized this problem in the late First Century, reflecting on his life of ministry as the gospel message had gone out to many people:

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10).

Interestingly, I have seen this passage described as a “Christian confessional bar of soap,” as God is able to forgive us and cleanse us of our sins if we ask Him. Our sin nature inherited in Adam still has a tendency to work its way into our lives, even after we have become born again and indwelt by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Further on in 1 John, the Apostle describes some of the benefits of a true salvation experience for those who have become the children of God:

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:1-10).

Here, we see that John clarifies the concept of sin and the fact that when we are *in Him and abiding in Him* we do not sin. But the problem is that in our spiritual journey, the sanctification process takes time, and a knowledge of just what sin is—and what righteousness

is—is mandatory in order for us to mature. Take this one example from *Vayikra* as a starter in your personal appraisal:

“Now if a person sins after he hears a public adjuration *to testify* when he is a witness, whether he has seen or *otherwise* known, if he does not tell *it*, then he will bear his guilt” (Leviticus 5:1).

Have you ever been in a predicament where you are a primary eyewitness to some sinful circumstances that were being investigated or adjudicated by some authority? This could be a civil or criminal offense from a minor misdemeanor to a felony. Perhaps you did not want to be involved in the investigation or prosecution because of your relationship to the offender. Or perhaps you were concerned about your potential loss of time. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, you might have justified your decision to disobey this command. On the other hand, by thinking and meditating on many of the different implications from this commandment, you could hopefully become a better corporate citizen to the community where you live. If you do not come forward, then the Law of Moses says that you will bear the guilt of the offender! I encourage you to consider this.

But what if you are an employee at a company and you witness some people stealing some of the company pens and paper for their own personal use? What if the owner of the company asks all the employees to report any known offenders? Are you going to come to the employer and report what you have witnessed? Or are you going to remain silent and bear the guilt of the offender?

On a spiritual level when we witness our brothers or sisters in sin, there is an admonition that allows us to deal with our brethren in love. In his final statement in his epistle, James gives us a strong encouragement to go to our brothers in order to keep their souls from death:

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

This is a strong parallel passage that echoes the words of Yeshua when He was instructing His Disciples about how to deal with issues of sin in the community of faith:

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly; and if he refuses to listen even to the assembly, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).

The problem we face on all of these levels throughout the world is that most people do not know the ramifications of this very Torah commandment. If we understood that the guilt of our lack of performance to testify for the society or company or spiritual groups, when we have personal first hand knowledge of offenses, then perhaps we would follow the instructions. In so doing, our culture may improve as offenders are duly prosecuted. Companies would avoid the loss of assets from internal theft. Finally, our spiritual bodies would function more righteously as the “sin in the camp” is properly handled. Most importantly, those who refuse to confront flagrant sin that they have personal knowledge about would not be burdened with the guilt that should rest upon the offender, rather than the one who keeps silent.

If you take the time to reflect on all of the different offerings in this portion, I am confident that you will be able to identify with some of the different sins of commission or omission and perhaps let the indwelling Spirit convict you of where you need to confess, repent and be restored to His grace.

This leads me to another aspect of what can be termed “progressive revelation” as we take a brief look at the Haftarah portion from Isaiah 43:21-44:23, and the two selected portions from the Apostolic Scriptures: Romans 8:1-13 and Hebrews 8.

First, understand that the Father has been deliberately communicating over time to His creatures about what His plan is for the ages. Before “in the beginning,” God knew that the crown of His Creation would fall from grace as they exercised their free will to make choices. In His

desire to create humans in His own likeness and image, He purposed to give them the capacity to choose in order to let them follow the inclinations of their hearts. Now picture the heart of God. Consider the fact that God Himself had to choose to sacrifice an incarnation of Himself in His Son Yeshua, in order to redeem the victims of the Fall. Here, the absolute love of the Creator for His Creation is epitomized. Before His first creative effort, God understood what was necessary to bring forth a people who would dwell with Him for eternity.

By the time the requirements of the Levitical sacrificial system are conveyed, the Lord communicates the travesty of sin and that a blood sacrifice is necessary to atone for transgressions against His commandments. Some of you might think that they are burdensome, but in reality, the Almighty knew from eternity past what is required for us to be in His presence. Part of His plan that we are studying in *Vayikra* this week is amplified and illuminated nearly a thousand years later by the Prophet Isaiah:

“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Put Me in remembrance, let us argue our case together; state your *cause*, that you may be proved right. Your first forefather sinned, and your spokesmen have transgressed against Me. So I will pollute the princes of the sanctuary, and I will consign Jacob to the ban and Israel to revilement” (Isaiah 43:25-28).

Despite the animal sacrifices, whether done perfectly, or disregarded by His people, only God Himself can erase or forgive the transgressions of human beings. In this passage, God references the sin of our “forefather” Adam, who categorically initiated the problem of sin in all of his descendants. But there is a solution, because God promises to send a Deliverer and send His Holy Spirit to those of us who are forgiven. As the Rock, Isaiah prophesies that the Lord is Israel’s King and its Redeemer:

“But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you, ‘Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; and you Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour out water on the thirsty *land* and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants; and they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water.’ This one will say, ‘I am the LORD’s;’ and that one will call on the name of Jacob; and another will write *on* his hand, ‘Belonging to the LORD,’ and will name Israel’s name with honor. Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any *other* Rock? I know of none” (Isaiah 44:1-8).

Here, it is clear that God has chosen Jacob and his progeny to be His servant to the other nations of the world. In time, the Lord states that He will pour out His Spirit upon His people. Isaiah further states that God has chosen Israel to “declare what is to come, and what will happen” (ESV). The problem is that we have to have the faith to believe that the inspired Word of God is from our loving Creator. If you know Him, that is not a problem, but if you have not been given a measure of faith regarding the veracity of the Holy Bible, then you are lacking the key to receiving not only His Spirit, but also the required redemption that His Word so clearly describes.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes a superb description of how the offer of redemption is available to all mankind, but does so based on what has been revealed down through the ages. When you read through this week’s Torah portion, *Vayikra*, I would ask you to consider the different offerings described, and realize that Israel has been chosen to communicate the plan of salvation to the entire world. The salvation that is available in Messiah Yeshua frees us from the condemnation in the Torah pronounced upon sinners, and we can be restored to full communion with the Father:

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For

what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Messiah, he does not belong to Him. If Messiah is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Yeshua from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Messiah Yeshua from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:1-14).

When you read this passage with a Torah foundation, you should understand why there is no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah Yeshua. Yeshua has become our blood offering, as we by faith believe in His atoning work. But with some Torah application, you can begin to understand more and more of some of the severe consequences of Adam’s transgression. As you walk according to the Spirit, I pray that the Lord will show you things that come from your flesh that are in opposition to His commandments. As you confess, repent, and eliminate them from your walk, you should become more and more like the Messiah. As you put to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit, you will not only live, but will be considered a son or daughter of God. This is an incentive that makes the study of the Torah and its admonitions to us today quite exciting!

The author of Hebrews adds to the comments of Paul, as more revelation comes forward about how important the words of Moses typify the required blood sacrifice of Yeshua. The animal sacrifices of the Torah could not offer the permanent atonement that Yeshua’s sacrifice now offers:

“For the Torah has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the actual manifestation of the originals. Therefore, it can never, by means of the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, bring to the goal those who approach the Holy Place to offer them. Otherwise, wouldn't the offering of those sacrifices have ceased? For if the people performing the service had been cleansed once and for all, they would no longer have sins on their conscience. No, it is quite the contrary—in these sacrifices is a reminder of sins, year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. This is why, on coming into the world, he says, ‘It has not been your will to have an animal sacrifice and a meal offering; rather, you have prepared for me a body. No, you have not been pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings. Then I said, ‘Look! In the scroll of the book it is written about me. I have come to do your will.’” In saying first, ‘You neither willed nor were pleased with animal sacrifices, meal offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings,’ things which are offered in accordance with the Torah; and then, ‘Look, I have come to do your will’; he takes away the first system in order to set up the second. It is in connection with this will that we have been separated for God and made holy, once and for all, through the offering of Yeshua the Messiah's body. Now every cohen stands every day doing his service, offering over and over the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this one, after he had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God, from then on to wait until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has brought to the goal for all time those who are being set apart for God and made holy” (Hebrews 10:1-14, CJB).

When you read this passage, the author of Hebrews is only summarizing what the Torah tells us about the animal sacrifices and how Yeshua is the Ultimate Sacrifice. He obviously knows

through the Spirit that the sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua is what the Father was talking about when He communicated through Isaiah that He would redeem His people. Powerful words pull together the necessity to understand the full revelation of God from “in the beginning” to the Prophets and Psalms make this passage a sobering description of what people need in order to preserve their souls. Our author even quotes a parallel passage to Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:34 about God ability to no longer remember sin:

“And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, ‘THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,’ *He then says*, ‘AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE’” (Hebrews 10:15-17).

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more’” (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

As you put the pieces together, I pray that you will realize that the Creator knew that only He can forgive sin, and that His sacrifice was required to accomplish His will and purposes for His creatures.

Comprehending the sacrificial system more fully is a blessing to those who take the time to meditate on the ramifications of intentional or unintentional disobedience. By doing so, it gives the revelatory power of the indwelling Spirit the opportunity to expose areas of your life that need to be dealt with through confession and repentance. As a result, those who are seeking the truth, while being led and taught by the Holy Spirit, have an opportunity to develop a deeper and more profound walk with the Lord as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:11-13).

Thankfully, we have a Creator who not only knew what He was going to have to do before He began the creative process, but most importantly, He did it with His own blood. Somehow, through it all and by His example of love, He is accomplishing His will while being pleased when He sees His sacrificial heart evident in His creatures. To Him goes all the glory, as our faith rests in His redeeming work as we mature in our own sacrificial understanding, being conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

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