

## **I NEED TO BELONG**

### **Leviticus 1:1–17, 6:8–13**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Chapter 6:8–13 is the instructions for priests in handling the offering that is described in Leviticus 1. You might say, “I sure hope the pastor’s not going to take us through this terribly boring book of Leviticus.” There might be more New Year’s resolutions that have broken down in the Book of Leviticus than any other single book of the Bible. People make resolutions on December 31 to read the Bible through the next year. Genesis is rather interesting. Exodus is pretty interesting up till the later chapters when we start getting the description for the tabernacle and the garments for the priests and the like. But Leviticus and Numbers are books that are wilderness books. Just like Israel broke down in the wilderness ,many people’s Bible reading resolutions have broken down in Leviticus and Numbers.

For many Christians this is a closed book, it’s a strange book. It talks about the slaughter of animals, about priestly rituals. It’s called “Leviticus” because it pertains to Levi or the priestly tribe. It has classifications on what you wear and what you don’t wear. Things that are clean and things that are unclean. It has a lack of a story line. Genesis and Exodus have a story line, a narrative. Leviticus is just a whole lot of series of instructions and for many people it is really a closed book.

But there are some good reasons for opening Leviticus. One is that it is God’s word. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 tells us, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV). All Scripture—and that includes Leviticus—is God breathed. The Lord has it in His word for a reason. Therefore, it is profitable. It is not enough to simply say a book of the

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Bible is inspired and then just leave it at that. It's not only inspired but it's inspiring. God not only breathed it into being in the beginning but He breathes it into our being now for some specific purpose.

We'll have to see as we go through this book whether or not you will affirm what Paul is saying in 2 Timothy 3:16. Will we indeed find this book God-breathed into our own life? That's the promise of Scripture. Let's put it to the test and see if it will come to pass.

The second good reason for looking at Leviticus is that it bears witness to Jesus Christ. Jesus, in His resurrection appearances, tells His disciples in Luke 24:44–45, “‘Everything written about Me in the law of Moses [Leviticus is part of the law] and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scripture.” We're going to ask the Lord to do the same thing as we look through the Book of Leviticus. Not to open our minds in some richly fanciful, allegorical sense that many people use to interpret the Book of Leviticus and denote some kind of spiritual meaning to every color, to every thread in the tabernacle. But instead take a legitimate meaning of what are the principles that God is teaching in this book that He intends to be timeless. And how does this book bear witness to the centrality of Jesus Christ in our lives?

The third reason why we should look at Leviticus is that it corresponds to our current life situation as a congregation. This year we're coming out of a transition time. There is a sense that we are a people who are temporarily waiting for a facility that God is calling us to. I felt in my spirit that this is the right time to talk about some of the principles that are in God's Word that come to people who are going through transition.

**I. With that in mind, let's look at the setting of Leviticus as it is given to us in the first two verses of Leviticus 1.**

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“The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock”’” (1:1–2, NIV).

**A.** Three things about these two verses that we would like to note. First, the Tent of Meeting.

The older terminology you may be more familiar with is the tabernacle. It was a portable center of worship that could move whenever the Children of Israel moved. Everything in it was portable and carriable. The outside of the enclosure—the courtyard—was about 150 feet long by about 75 feet wide. It was surrounded by beautiful linens supported by wooden beams set in silver. The wooden beams were 15 feet tall and it made a beautiful outside enclosure. Inside was the altar of burnt offering which was about 4-foot 6 inches tall and 7 foot 6 inches square. It is where all the sacrifices were offered. The laver was where people washed themselves from the altar. The Tent of Meeting was a little portable building. The most sacred thing in it as the ark of the covenant and the Holy of Holies which contained the tablets of the Law, God’s provisions that He would be faithful to His covenant with Israel.

Why the emphasis on this Tent of Meeting? I could sum it up by saying that it was to be in the center of wherever Israel encamped. When they moved, it was to be out in front. In those two places we see God’s eternal design for our lives. When we are on the move He wants to be out in front. But when we are encamped He wants to be in the center of our experience. If you look at how Israel was gathered you’d find three tribes on the north, three on the south, three on the east, three on the west. In the center is the place where God was worshipped. The whole dilemma of Israel continually in its experience was whenever God was no longer in the center then real trouble broke out in their experience. That might be said as well in our lives. God’s purpose for

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us and one of the central first meanings of this book is to teach us that God must be in the very center of our lives.

It took a little bit of doing to put up this portable tent. It was more than a tent. It represented a tremendous deal of sacrifice on the part of the people that built it.

In the center and priority, God is to be in the center and priority.

**B.** A second thing the first two verses tell us is that God called to Moses. “Called” is a stronger word than “spoke” or “said”. To call means to speak in a loud, clear voice. Later we’ll see that a leper is to call out, “Unclean! Unclean!” God is calling, God is speaking forcefully in this book. It’s a really wonderful thing to contrast the beginning of Leviticus with how God called in Exodus 19 on the top of Sinai. When God called to Moses to come up to Sinai to give the Law people were not even allowed to come close to the mountain and touch it. God was giving us His prohibitions. But when He speaks again from the Tent of Meeting, which is the place of sacrifice, He is already taking into account the fact that we are going to break His law, the law He gave on Sinai. So the whole purpose of the Tent of Meeting is to give us a place where we could draw near to God and approach Him.

His call, whether at Sinai or the call at the Tent of Meeting, is the two-sided nature of God. On the one hand God gives us a law and on the other hand God gives us the means of having relationship with Him even when we have broken the law. God’s call to redemption is just as strong as His call to the law and to judgment. God called.

**C.** A third thing that we see in these two verses is that there is a mention of sacrifices. Years ago I visited a synagogue and spoke with the reader of the Torah. I asked him “Why is it that modern Judaism does not practice animal sacrifices inasmuch as Leviticus 17:11 says, ‘Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins?’” He flushed and kind of embarrassed said,

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“Long ago our people did practice animal sacrifice. But it is a rather barbaric custom and we have outgrown it and realized that religion is ethical and doesn’t have any thing to do with things like slaughter of animals, blood and the like. I thought, “When you look at the book of Leviticus this is anything but that.” I picked up on the phrase, “Animal sacrifices are barbaric,” and for many people, of course, it does seem rather barbaric. Many people think the animal sacrifices were barbaric. There are several reasons why they weren’t. First, throughout Israel there was no human sacrifice. That would not be true of the surrounding religions. A second reason, that was the means of the common Israelites getting meat. In fact, all meat that was eaten on the table had either first been offered in sacrifice or when killed the blood had already been poured out to God. All blood was sacred. It belonged to God and was to be used for atonement alone. Other than the burnt offering, which was completely burned up, all the other offerings, the worshipper took part of it home. It was a means of everybody eating. It wasn’t barbaric. Unless you’re vegetarian and say all meat is barbaric.

Another reason why the sacrifices were not barbaric is that they provided a dramatic visual of how God deals with sin. God’s dealing with sin involves the fact that sin requires death and the death of the animal was an indication that God accepted it rather than the death of the person for breaking His law. And it was a dramatic visual of the fact that God would accept a substitute. Therefore John the Baptist will later say of Jesus, thinking of the Old Testament sacrifices, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1). The cross is, of course, in a sense barbaric, that man would do that to the Son of God. Yet it is through the very nature of sacrifice that we learn that God accepts the death of a substitute and that He will allow that substitute to stand in our place.

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There were a number of sacrifices that were allowed in the Old Testament system. There are five of them described in the first 7 chapters of Leviticus.

#### **II. The first offering that we come to is today's offering, the offering described in Leviticus 1: "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect" (verse 3, NIV).**

In verses 3–9 you have the burnt offering if it is a bull. In verses 10–13 you have the burnt offering if it is a sheep. And in verses 14–17, a burnt offering if it is a pigeon or dove. Then in 6:8–13 you have a description of how the priests are to handle the burnt offering. "Burnt" is from a Hebrew word which means, "what goes up." It's the what-goes-up offering.

We try to use the word "burnt" because it describes what happened in the offering; everything about it was burnt. The word "holocaust" comes from his idea of burnt offering. "Holocaust" means "whole burning." When you read of something being a holocaust it means it was totally destroyed and nothing was left. There was a path of devastation. So this is a holocaust offering. This is a burnt offering. This is an offering that goes up.

#### **III. What was its purpose?**

It was the most common offering described in Leviticus. It is the most common offering described by the Jewish people up until the time when the temple was destroyed. It was performed every morning and every evening for the whole nation. It was performed many times on holy days. It was performed as well for individuals. It had basically two purposes.

**A.** First, that the Lord might accept us. The whole idea is that God is a holy God who does not accept sinful persons on their terms. He will demand the death of a sacrifice. Through that death God will accept the person who offers it.

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**B.** The second idea of the burnt offering is that atonement may be made, Leviticus 1:4. It will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement, that is, making ourselves at one with God. The idea of atonement has within it two possibilities. One is to wash or to wipe clean. What we have in sacrifice is that God accepts the death of a substitute and our sins are washed or wiped clean. The other idea of atonement is redemption or ransom. A ransom is paid and the guilty person is let go free.

In our society “ransom” has a bad connotation to it. It’s generally used in a terrorist attack. The terrorist is bought off through the paying of a ransom. But in biblical times “ransom” wasn’t associated with that kind of idea at all. A ransom was a means of escaping a more serious penalty.

Like in Exodus 21. Suppose you kept an ox and this ox was known to have a bad temper. It had gotten loose a few times before, and you were careless in keeping that ox fenced up and the ox got out again and this time it gored someone to death. You as the owner of the ox were responsible for the ox’s action and the penalty against you was death. But you could get off from the death penalty if you would pay a ransom to the party’s family that had suffered the loss. The ransom let you off the hook. There is a sense too in which you come to this meaning of atonement that God allows the payment of an animal to let us off the hook of His judgment.

Ultimately this will all be transferred to God’s Son who pays the penalty for our sins.

The purpose of the offering, therefore, was to make us acceptable to God and was to make atonement. The burnt offering was not for a specific sin. But it was for all those shortcomings and imperfections that surround our human nature. It was for the purpose of giving our whole life to God. It wasn’t “I cheated somebody so I better go offer an offering.” But it was “I’m

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mortal, I'm fallible. I'm a human being and I need to be right with God. There is a sense within me of incompleteness and I need to get right with God and be acceptable," so the burnt offering. Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (KJV). He's talking about the burnt offering, the presentation of all of life to the Lord.

#### **IV. The elements of the offering can be easily seen.**

**A.** The first element is it's voluntary. "When or if you bring an offering." There were probably two dangers to the burnt offering in regard to the word "voluntary." The one is never bringing an offering at all. If we never bring an offering, if an offering is never made for sin then there is no forgiveness.

The second danger is having too much of a guilt complex, so every day you bring an offering, a whole burnt offering. There needs to be a balance in respect to guilt in our lives. God wants us to take care of guilt but He doesn't want us to have an overworked conscious that we are never sure that God has really and truly forgiven us for our sins.

This burnt offering was not a command. It was given voluntarily. God will not command the obedience of our lives to Him. Our lives must be given in voluntarily surrender and commitment to Him.

**B.** The second feature in the elements was that there were a variety of animals that were used. Three. The bull was for those who were wealthy and had the money to offer a bull. The sheep or goat was for the middle class. And the dove or pigeon was for the poor. That is to say it had to be domesticated. It could not be a wild animal. Wild animals cost nothing. And God demanded that

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the sacrifice would cost something. The bull and the sheep must be young. They must be without blemish. They must be the very best. What is being said is that the offering must cost something. This is teaching us that we must not give God the last of our priorities, the worst of our time, the change of our lives. What He seeks is the best. If we don't have anything to give Him at all He takes pigeons. Pigeons have always been plentiful. A man with no property could catch a pigeon. The Lord's parents when they dedicated Him brought an offering of pigeons or doves. They did not have the money to bring a more expensive offering. They offered the pigeon instead.

**C.** The third thing about the elements of the offering was it was public. Everybody knew you were doing it. You can't hide your sin, *or* your dedication to God. Everybody knew what you were doing it. It was public. There was no secret discipleship.

When you brought the sacrifice to the altar, as a first act you laid your hands on the sacrifice that you were offering. The words "laying on of hands" doesn't quite adequately convey the meaning of what was involved. The intensity of the verb would tell us that the hands are to be pressed heavy upon the sacrifice. The idea of leaning or putting your weight upon the sacrifice is something described. The whole idea of pressing carries with it two words—transfer and identification. Transfer is the idea that what is in me, the incompleteness, the sin is now being transferred to this animal. And identification means that when this animal is killed it is I who am being killed. When this animal's blood is being poured out upon the altar it is my life that is being offered up to God. When this animal is burned it is God judging sin and therefore He has judged the sin in my life. So the pressing of the hands meant transfer and it meant identification. The same way when we come to the cross of Calvary. We are transferring our sins to the body and person of Jesus. We are identifying with Him. We are saying, "He died and I died in Him. He suffered my death for me." Transfer and identification.

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The ceremony was to be no mere ritual or courtesy. It was a very vivid experience. Often the worshipper, when he was laying his hands upon the animal, would be singing some song or giving some form of prayer to God. He is to press his hand heavily upon the head of Jesus, and Jesus will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement.

When the sacrifice is done you walk away clean for the altar is the place where God removes sin.

**D.** Following this, there was the killing. The worshipper slew the bull, the sheep, or the goat. The priests slew the dove; the reason perhaps is that God had special care for the poor and therefore he allowed the priest to do this in order that there wouldn't be a messy job in the killing of the dove.

**E.** This is followed by the sprinkling of the blood. The Scriptures tell us that life is in the blood and the blood was not to be drunk by any Israeli. Whenever life was shed, the blood was to be caught. The worshipper would kill the animal but the priest was there to catch the blood in a basin and to throw that blood against the sides of the altar, symbolizing that the life in the blood had been poured out. It's now given to God. Hebrews says that Jesus entered once for all into the holy place taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood therefore securing an eternal redemption. In Hebrews 9:22 tells us "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

**F.** Finally came the burning of the offering. The meat is portioned up. It's cut. It's easier to burn that way. The entrails and legs were washed, clearing it of all uncleanness. The crop was thrown away because nothing that was unclean can be offered to God. The whole offering is burnt up. It's given as dedication to God, symbolizing that the whole of life belongs to God.

**V. In Leviticus 6:13 there is special instructions for priests given in this offering.**

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In particular, we could label it “perpetual.” There was to be a perpetual offering on the altar, day and night, at all times. The burnt offering was to be offered throughout Israel’s history, symbolizing the constant need of the nation for sacrifice, for forgiveness, and for acceptance with God. Christ is the perpetual sacrifice offered once for us, but the merits of His work go on without end. His sacrifice is always available.

There is perpetual attention to dress. The priests must wear certain things. Linen garments when he is taking the ashes away from the altar and changing to ordinary garments when he is taking the ashes outside the camp. He is never to be careless.

The perpetual fire symbolizes that God is a consuming fire and the fire on the altar is to burn perpetually, symbolizing God’s judgment is ever at work. In modern culture there is the idea that God does not judge. Even within the Church there’s this tendency always to talk about the God of love and not sufficiently to talk about the God whose love is also met by His judgment. He will move and does move against iniquity. The idea of the perpetual fire indicates that God’s judgment is ready to break out in our lives when we are not covered by the sacrifice of Christ.

#### **VI. What is the result of the burnt offering?**

At the end of each paragraph whether it’s the bull or whether it’s the sheep or goat or the pigeon you’ll find this phrase, “An offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” I have never been all that impressed by the smell of burning meat. I don’t even like to barbecue that well.

Burning meat is not a soothing aroma to me. It’s a strange metaphor to use of God, that a sacrifice burning up would be a soothing or pleasing aroma. When this sacrifice occurred from a believing heart God saw it as that which was pleasing. It symbolized the obedience of the worshipper. It symbolized that God again had fellowship with His people. It symbolized that God forgave His people. God is pleased with the obedience, with the fellowship, and with the

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forgiveness that He's able to give as a result of this sacrifice. Therefore it is an aroma pleasing to Him. Nothing can make God more pleased than to have fellowship with us, than to forgive us our sins, than that we should obey Him by coming and claiming His means of redemption. It is a pleasing aroma.

Ephesians 5:2 says "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (NIV). When Christ died on the cross it was a fragrant offering to God. Why? Because it was through that offering that we were allowed to come to God, to have fellowship with God, and to have the forgiveness that God offers.

Manward the result of the offering is that we are accepted. Since the Garden of Eden our basic problem is to get back home. How do we get back home? How do we get back to Paradise? How do we get back into fellowship with God? How do we get back to the ideal environment? We have this feeling that we are away from God, that there is something deeply disturbing that is going on inside of us. How can we be whole again? How can we be accepted? How can we walk with God again? The whole meaning of this offering is that we might now be made acceptable to God. We come back home to God.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, today we've looked at one of the types of Your redemption, this offering. Lord, we may think there are persons here today who have not made You the sacrifice of their life. They have not yet identified with You or transferred their sins to You. You want this to happen. You want our eyes to be lifted to You. And to see You as John the Baptist saw You—"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." I pray for that person in this communion service today that Your presence would become very real that You would cause us to literally transfer our sins to You. I cast all my sin upon You. Then Lord, we want to think about some of the other

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indications of this offering for us. How we're to come to You when we have broken Your law and to restore fellowship because of the sacrifice and death of another. That we are to offer our very best to You even as You gave Your very best to us, the Lamb of God without blemish and perfect in the youth of manhood You gave to us. We thank You Lord for Your sacrifice. We thank You that You have made a way for us to get back to You. We bless Your name today and we consecrate now this service and this communion to You and to ourselves that You might be Lord in it. We ask in the name of Christ. Amen.