**Instructions for the Offerings**

As we begin our study of the book of Leviticus, we find the Israelites still camped at the base of Mt. Sanai where they experienced the high of entering into a covenant with God and the low of idol worship. We previously talked about how the Bible slowed down during the 50 chapters of Genesis. The first 11 chapters cover roughly 2000 years and the remaining 39 cover about 280 years. The book of Exodus provides us with about 400 years of history in 2 verses followed by an undetermined period of the plagues (probably a few months) then 1 year culminating in the completion of the tabernacle. The book of Leviticus records no specific timeline, however it is devoted solely to the commands God gave Moses and it is clear that the Israelites remained at Mt. Sanai during the events of this book, probably less than 1 year. Matthew Henry pointed out that the only historical event recorded is the account of the consecration of the priests in chapters 8 and 9. We need to look no further than the origin of the name of the book which is Levi to understand that it is all about the laws that the priests were to uphold. The daunting list of regulations underscores the need for a Savoir who rescued us from the treadmill of the law. Peter talked about the law being a yoke that the Jews were not able to bear and the saving grace of Jesus (see Acts 15:10-11).

The first 7 chapters cover God’s requirements for the following offerings:

Burnt Offering-Burnt offerings were sacrificed to God as early as chapter 8 of Genesis when Noah prepared a burnt offering after the flood had subsided. God required burnt offerings daily at the tabernacle as well as designated feasts. In chapter 1 the burnt offering appears to be one that an individual brings to the tabernacle rather than a corporate offering. Depending on the giver’s means, the offering could be a bull, sheep, goat or fowl. Burnt offerings were completely consumed by the fire with no portion eaten by the giver or a priest.

Grain Offering-Referred to as meat offerings in the KJV, grain offerings described here were made as free will offerings. They would have been flour, cakes or roasted grains. Only a portion of the offering was burned with the rest set aside as food for the priests.

Fellowship Offering-These were offerings (peace offerings in KJV) made as praise or thanksgiving to God or accompanying a vow made to God. These animals could have been male or female and a portion of the animal was used as a meal for the person who made the offering.

Sin Offering-These were sacrifices made as atonement for sin and were animal sacrifices of bulls, sheep, goats or fowl according the means of the one who made the offer. Unless the blood of the animal was brought into the Holy Place of the tabernacle, a portion of the animal could be eaten by a priest and his family. These offerings were sometimes made for unintentional sins committed by the community or an individual.

Guilt Offering (trespass offering, KJV)-These were offerings made for violation of the Lord’s holy things (those things dedicated to God such as inadvertently eating a first born animal). The offering was accompanied by restitution paid to the priests. Guilt offerings were also made by intentional sins against another person and would also have involved the payment of restitution plus a penalty.

Whether the offerings were animals or grain, God required that the Israelites bring their best to him. The animals had to be without defect symbolizing Jesus who was without flaw. I read an amusing anecdote about a herdsman who had 2 bulls born at the same time and could not decide which should be offered to God until one died and he told his wife that God’s bull had died. The question we should ask ourselves is: Do we offer God what is right or what is left? I previously included the following quote by Charles Sturgeon but it is worthy of repetition: *“Our gifts are not to be measured by the amount we contribute but by the surplus kept in our own hand”*.

Personal offerings were indeed personal because the owner had to lay his hands on the animal and actually had to kill it himself. On the Day of Pentecost Peter invoked this image when he told his fellow Jews they had crucified Jesus (Act. 2:36). The laying on hands represented the transference of guilt from the owner to the innocent animal again symbolizing Jesus who became the atoning sacrifice (propitiation KJV) for our sins (1st John. 4:10).

Grain offerings could not contain any yeast which harkens back to the Passover when the Israelites were told to prepare a meal in haste not allowing the bread to rise. Yeast in also often associated with sin and negative influences. Jesus told his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:6). Paul warned that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1st Cor. 5:6-7). In this verse Paul was speaking about boasting or pride which has led to division within many churches.

Over time the sacrifices/offerings made by the Israelites became ritualistic. Romans 12:1 tells us we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices as a daily reminder that we share in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.