



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from March 28 afternoon through April 4 morning

Due to the volume of reading, our weekly group guides will not be a detailed commentary of each chapter, but rather an overview that will include some details where needed.

Leviticus 1

The first several chapters of Leviticus outline the details of the proper practice of sacrifice under the Mosaic Law. This book is attributed to Moses, through whom God gave these instructions to Israel. This note offers some insight regarding the concept of sacrifice:

Under the Law sacrifice was given by God as the only sufficient means for Israelites to remain in harmonious fellowship with Himself. It is noteworthy that the revelation of the sacrificial system through Moses did not include the revelation of any typical significance of the sacrifices. It did, however, spell out clearly the principle of atonement through a substitutionary sacrifice ... Another important factor is the distinction between two relationships which an Israelite had/could have with God: (a) a corporate relationship with God as a theocratic nation (cf. Ex. 19–20), and (b) a personal relationship with God based on individual regeneration and justification by faith.

F. Duane Lindsey, "Leviticus," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 164.

The direct connection between sacrifice and atonement is given in verses 3-5. An animal brought to God from the herd had to be a male without any blemish or defect. This allowed an Israelite who needed to offer a sacrifice to be "accepted before the Lord," (v. 3). The one offering a sacrifice was to place his hand on the head of the animal before killing it, and then the priests would apply the blood to the altar of the tabernacle. The animal would then be cut into pieces and the priests were responsible for arranging these pieces and burning them on the altar as burnt offering to God. The rest of this chapter describes the procedure for the sacrifice of a sheep or goat, and of a bird. Chapter 2 (which was not part of our reading this week) offers details regarding grain offerings.

These were given to Israel as basic instructions for how to carry out a sacrifice that would atone for the sin of an individual. The various sacrifices would allow for families to bring offerings to the Lord, regardless of their socioeconomic standing.

Leviticus 4

God's instructions to Moses in these early chapters of Leviticus deal with sins that are "unintentional," (v. 2). This means that sins committed by mistake were still violations of the

law and therefore required a sacrifice to obtain forgiveness. In fact, sins that were committed with the intent to commit them or with blatant disregard to God and His law could not be forgiven through a sacrifice brought by an individual. Leviticus 4 outlines requirements for sin offerings related to various situations: the sin of a priest (vs. 3-12), the sin of the entire congregation (vs. 13-21), the sin of a leader (vs. 22-26) and the sin of a common person (vs. 27-35).

Leviticus 5

Chapter 5 continues instructions regarding sin offerings. God gave to Moses specific procedures to be followed for various kinds of sins. This section of the law addresses sin related to the refusal to speak as a witness (v. 1), touching something unclean (vs. 2-3) and speaking a rash oath (v. 4). There were allowances made for sacrifices various financial values so that anyone could bring a sacrifice that would provide for the forgiveness of sin (vs. 6-13).

The remainder of this chapter and the beginning of the next are dedicated to guilt offerings. The first type of guilt offering was brought in the case of “a breach of faith ... in any of the holy things of the Lord,” (v. 15). What does this mean? The following note offers help in understanding this:

This could refer to the improper use of sacrificial flesh eaten by worshipers after a fellowship offering; misuse of the “most holy” portions of the grain, sin, or guilt offerings which were reserved for the priests alone (2:3, 10; cf. 22:14–16); failure to present to God due gifts of sacrifices, tithes, firstfruit offerings, or things dedicated to God (cf. chap. 27); failure to fulfill dedicatory vows (Num. 6:11–12); or deprivation of service due to the Lord (cf. Lev. 14:24).

F. Duane Lindsey, “Leviticus,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 183.

In addition to the sacrifice, the offender was to provide restitution for the property that was violated plus a fine of 20 percent of the value of that property.

The guilt offering spelled out in verses 17-19 seem to point to the case of a person committing a sin without realizing it, later experiencing a guilty conscience and then coming to confess the sin.

Leviticus 6:1-7

In a continuation of the the instructions regarding guilt offerings, this chapter addresses sin committed when a person “commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it,” (vs. 2-3). Although sins of this type were committed against another person, they were also considered sins against God. In

addition to a sacrifice for atonement, the offender also paid back the one he had deceived, with an additional 20 percent fine added.

Leviticus 16

This chapter gives specifics regarding the Day of Atonement. This is a day of sacrifice that took place once a year for the sins of all the people of Israel:

This chapter comprises the ceremonial and theological pivot upon which the entire book of Leviticus turns. Previous legislation has dealt with the different kinds of sacrifices and the conditions under which they were to be offered, the emphasis being upon the provision for individual needs. Now the focus is upon the making of atonement for all the uncleannesses and sins of inadvertence of the entire Israelite congregation, beginning with the priesthood. Six months after the passover had been celebrated, the people were instructed to 'afflict themselves', after which the high priest would make atonement for them. Like the passover, this ceremony had to be observed annually, and it marked the occasion when the entire religious community was mobilized before God in a joint act of confession and atonement. It was a time of great solemnity, unlike the annual feasts, and if fasting was involved in the preparatory self-discipline, as many interpreters think, it was the only ceremony that demanded such a communal exercise. By its nature it was a distinctive religious observance and was central to the worship-life of the nation. The importance of the high priest is made clear in the position which he holds in the rituals as the mediator between God and man. The ritual is given in its entirety, which is fitting in a manual of public worship.

R. K. Harrison, Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 169–170.

Aaron (and subsequent high priests) was to offer a bull and ram as sacrifices for his own sins. He could not come into holy place of the tabernacle without them. In addition, he was to wash himself and wear the priestly garments of linen. He was to offer the sacrifice for himself first, killing the bull, burning incense in the holy place and then sprinkling the bull's blood there as well. Once atonement had been made for himself, he was then to offer one of the goats as a sacrifice for the sins of the people, sprinkling its blood as he did the bull's blood. This goat was chosen by the casting of lots. After the first goat had been killed and its blood sprinkled, Aaron then was to lay his hands on the head of the live goat and confess the sins of the people. With the help of another man who was prepared for the task, he then sent the live goat out into the wilderness. Of particular interest regarding this goat is that its lot was cast "for Azazel" (vs. 8,10):

Three principal explanations have been suggested: first, that the term describes the abstract concept of removal; secondly, that the word is a proper name synonymous with the powers of evil to which the sin-laden goat quite properly went; and thirdly, that it was the name of a wilderness demon which needed to be propitiated in some manner. Any mythological explanation can be dismissed immediately as having no place

whatever in the most sacred ordinance of Hebrew cultic worship. The notion that the Israelites ought to make propitiatory or other offerings to such supposed wilderness demons as satyrs was repudiated in the following chapter (Lev. 17:7), and thus it cannot be associated with the unique character of the day of atonement. Probably the best explanation is that the word was a rare technical term describing 'complete removal', i.e. of communal guilt, and that later personifications brought about myths and legends concerning Azazel in Jewish writings.

R. K. Harrison, Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 173.

This public ceremony allowed the people of Israel to see that their sins had been forgiven, and in fact had been completely removed.

Discussion Questions

1. How has spending time reading these chapters of Leviticus helped your understanding of the Old Testament sacrificial system instituted by God? What questions do you still have?
2. What does it mean to you to learn that sacrifices were to be made for sins that were committed unintentionally?
3. Attempt to picture yourself as an Israelite living in the Old Testament period. What would it be like to have to offer an animal sacrifice for your sin? Would this change your view of sin? If so, how?
4. What do you think is the significance of making restitution for property and adding 20 percent when a person committed a breach of faith regarding holy things or against another person?
5. Think about the Day of Atonement as outlined in this week's reading. What would be your mindset if you had the opportunity to experience this annual ceremony?
6. How does this week's reading help your understanding and appreciation for the concept of atonement, and for the sacrifice of Jesus as he died in our place?