

Explore the Bible: Set Before

October 17, 2017

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 5 focuses on Leviticus 1:3-9; 2:1-3; 3:1-5.*

Now that we are leaving our study of Exodus, we enter a book focused on explanation, where little narrative is found. This should not scare anyone from pursuing this significant piece of Israel's story, yet it should remind us to prepare for it.

To help with this, agree to a "reading plan" of Leviticus for these coming weeks your group may follow and use to keep each other accountable. Like athletes in a training period, we need accountability and mutual commitment to grow and strengthen.

In Leviticus, we discover a good deal of the "why" in Israel's relationship with God. Let this be a study for enlightening a modern-day Christian view with the Jewish foundation on which the view is built. It is only fitting to begin by explaining the offerings that would take place at the Tent of Meeting.

The Burnt Offering

This first offering can be explained more clearly by considering its Hebrew noun *'olah*, which is connected to its verb meaning, "to ascend" (Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, 5). This consumed sacrifice would create an offering that ascended, making sense of it creating "an aroma pleasing to the Lord."

In his commentary, Levine also reminds us that "the *'olah* was a signal to God that his worshipers desired to bring their needs to his attention; its purpose was to secure an initial response from him." Whether one could

provide a bull, sheep or goat, or a dove or pigeon, this offering was to communicate to God.

The message here is stated in verse 4: Atonement. *Consider a good definition of “atonement” and why it is necessary.* The blameless animal would take the blame on behalf of the guilty sinner, costing the creature its life and dignity. *Why would God instruct them to do this?* God requires perfection, and the scent of a perfect sacrifice would please God, holding back his hand of wrath.

The Grain Offering

While the burnt offering includes the sacrifice of an animal, the grain offering is more of a gift offering. One may recall the first murder in the Bible (Genesis 4:3-12) was related to two brothers who gave different offerings; the one who gave the grain offering was not well received. *What should we make of this?*

We must assert that this offering simply is distinct from the others, and it serves a purpose different from the others. This could be seen not only as an offering of gratitude to God, but also as a way to bless those who ministered between God and his people.

A unique insight would be to see how God in a way shares this offering with those who served as his priests. *How does “sharing” speak of both God and the giver as a theme for the grain offering?* This offering certainly invokes a natural reaction of gratitude.

The Fellowship Offering

Here we return to the sacrifice of an animal, either male or female, for the purpose of fellowship. Some translations refer to this as a peace offering,

which speaks to its role in restoring fellowship between the sinner and God. The use of blood in the sacrifice is even more specific.

Compare this offering to the previous two, discussing their shared intentions and unique roles in worship. What is said in the chapter points to another unique aspect of fellowship: A meal of fellowship and rejoicing together (W.H. Bellinger Jr., *Leviticus and Numbers*, 33). One may see that meals continue to be an indicator of fellowship.

In the realm of Baptists, jokes often are linked to potluck meals and post-service fellowships with cookies and Kool-Aid. Perhaps one may see how the table and fellowship are even more spiritually linked than physical. Nevertheless, we see that peace with God not only requires the ritual offering, but also a table reservation.

Conclusion

Perhaps these descriptions help us to understand how the sacrifice and rituals began, as well as how they heavily influence our understanding of Jesus's ultimate sacrifice. For the sinner, there is a need to confess and repent, both of which can be seen in the purpose of these offerings.

Both devotion and gratitude are seen in these, and most important, we see an opportunity to draw closer to God. *Ask your group: 'What are you willing to do to get closer to God?'* Sin is the clear division between humanity and our Creator, and sin must be atoned for to repair the division.

The song, "Come to the Table" seems poignant for each of these offerings, and most notably the fellowship offering: "Come join the sinners who have been redeemed. Take your place beside the Savior. Sit down and be set free." An offering does not get us a seat, but it does put in the request. And when God gets such a request, his response is to receive your request (offering) and welcome you to his table.

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