

Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Vayikra* ויקרא "And He Called"

Elohim called to Moses, speaking to him from the tabernacle. He said:

"Vayikra el Moshe vayedaber YHWH elav me'ohel mo'ed le'emor..."

Scripture for study: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 1:1 – 5:26 (6:7)

The sixth letter of the Hebrew *Aleph Bet*¹ is the letter Vav. In the ancient Hebrew and Paleo-Canaanite ideographs the letter Vav is the picture of a nail or a hook. It should not surprise us then that in the Hebrew language this letter serves as the conjunction "AND." When the letter Vav is prefixed to a Hebrew word it performs the function of linking two words or phrases together, such as, cats AND dogs, man AND woman, this AND that. The name of this week's Torah portion, *Vayikra*, begins with such a conjunction. *Vayikra* means "AND He called." The root word is *karah* (Qof, Resh, Hey), which means called. The addition of the conjunction Vav means "AND He called."

Because of the presence of the word "AND" we must ask the question, "What is this conjunction connecting?" The answer is, "The last portion in the book of Exodus² AND the first portion in Leviticus."³ While this week's portion does in fact mark the beginning of the second book of the Torah, it is clearly connected by the conjunction AND to the preceding book. The Torah is telling us that Leviticus is not a completely independent revelation. The book of *Vayikra* is the continuation of the revelation given to Moses in the book of Exodus. The last portion in the book of Exodus concludes with the building of the tabernacle and the presence of YHWH filling the tabernacle. Our portion this week begins with YHWH calling to Moses from the completed tabernacle, revealing its sacrificial purpose. We should note that unlike the other books in the Torah, Leviticus does not begin with an introductory narrative. The narrative has already been given in the final chapters of Exodus. The book of Leviticus starts immediately with specific teachings on the various offerings. All of this evidence points to the reality that Leviticus is not an autonomous collection of teachings but a continuation of the revelation received by Moses on Mount Sinai. By understanding the connection between these two books

we shall understand that what is spoken by YHWH from the tabernacle has the same importance and authority as that which was spoken to Moses up on the mountaintop.

As we have already stated, our portion begins with specific instructions for the Levites and *cohanim*⁴ concerning the various offerings that the children of Israel are to bring upon the altar of YHWH. Since the predominant revelation contained in this second book of the Torah concerns the functioning of the Levites and *cohanim*, the Greek, Latin and English title for this book is Leviticus.⁵

Before we begin looking at the specific offerings I would like to address two other introductory questions. The first question concerns the motivation for studying the book of the priests. Some believers suggest that since there is no Temple, altar, *Cohen Gadol*,⁶ *cohanim*, or Levites functioning in Jerusalem, we do not need to study the offerings, sacrifices, and teachings involving the priesthood. Unfortunately there are many in the Christian Church today who would confirm this erroneous thinking, teaching that we do not need to study these things since “Jesus” has “done away” with the ritual laws. Yeshua clearly states that he came to fulfill the Torah and not abolish it,⁷ but beyond this simple answer lies a greater motivation. The Brit Chadasha⁸ clearly contradicts the Church’s teaching that the Temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifices have all been done away with. Concerning the Temple, the Brit Chadasha declares:

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of Elohim, and that the Spirit of Elohim dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of Elohim, him shall Elohim destroy; for the temple of Elohim is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of Elohim, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19)

“And what agreement hath the temple of Elohim with idols? For ye are the temple of the living Elohim; as Elohim hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their Elohim, and they shall be my people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of Elohim; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Yeshua Messiah himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in YHWH: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of Elohim through the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)

These are but a few of the verses that very clearly declare that there is still a “temple of Elohim” in this world. If there is still a temple, what about a priesthood and sacrifices? Again let us look to the writings of the Brit Chadasha for our answer.

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to Elohim by Yeshua Messiah.” (1 Peter 2:5)

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

“And hath made us kings and priests unto Elohim and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 1:5)

“And hast made us unto our Elohim kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:10)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of Elohim, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Elohim, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to Elohim continually, that is, the fruit of our lips give thanks to his name.” (Hebrews 13:15)

The testimony of the Brit Chadasha is very clear. There still is a temple, a priesthood, and sacrifices to be offered. It would be wise for every believer in Yeshua to know how to make his temple (body) a fit habitation for YHWH. We need also to know what will make our living sacrifices acceptable to YHWH. As believers we have all been called to become a kingdom of priests.⁹ It is in the book of Leviticus that we shall learn how to fulfill this unique calling. But there is yet another reason that we should understand the function of the priesthood and the sacrifices. We will address this answer as we address the second question: “Why animal sacrifices?” To begin this discussion I will draw upon the wisdom of the rabbis.

Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon,¹⁰ also known as Rambam or Maimonides, in his Guide for the Perplexed states that the reason YHWH instituted this custom of animal sacrifices was due to the weakness of man.

It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other; the nature of man will not allow him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed. Now Elohim sent Moses to make (the Israelites) a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6) by means of the knowledge of Elohim. Cf.: “Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord is Elohim” (ibid 5:39). The Israelites were commanded to devote themselves to His service; cf.: “and to serve him with all your heart” (ibid 11:13); “and you shall serve the Lord your Elohim” (Exodus 23:25); and ye shall serve Him” (Deuteronomy 13:5). But the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up consisted in sacrificing animals in temples containing images, to bow down to those images, and to burn incense before them. It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of Elohim, as displayed in the whole of Creation, that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these modes of worship; for to obey such a commandment would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally clings to that to which he is used. “¹¹

Maimonides here argues that the whole of the sacrificial system was a concession on Elohim's part to the familiar pagan practices of Israel's past. Since it would be contrary to human nature to make drastic changes in worship practices, Maimonides suggests that the Eternal One saw fit simply to direct these familiar pagan worship practices away from the false elohims and toward Himself. For as brilliant a man as Maimonides may have been, his understanding on this matter is clearly lacking, for his whole rationale for the sacrificial system based upon our pagan past practice is contradicted by the Torah itself.

"Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their elohims, saying, How did these nations serve their elohims? Even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto YHWH thy Elohim: for every abomination to YHWH, which he hateth, have they done unto their elohims." (Deuteronomy 12:30-31)

Clearly YHWH would not approve of any past pagan practice being used to honor Him. What YHWH has established is unique to Him.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman,¹² also known as Nahmanides and as the Ramban, disagreed with Maimonides, and put forth his own more logical rationale for the sacrificial system.

A more acceptable rationale is the one set out as follows: Seeing that human conduct is expressed in thought, speech, and action, Elohim instituted that a person who has committed a transgression and offers a sacrifice shall place his hands on it- symbolizing the deed; make a confession- as a reminder of the misused power of speech; and burn with fire the bowels and kidneys- which are the organs of thought and lust; and the legs- symbols of the human hands and feet, instruments which serve man in all his activities. And the blood shall be sprinkled on the altar- representing his life blood. All this should make him realize that having sinned against Elohim with his body and soul he would deserve to have his blood spilled and his body burnt. However, Elohim in His infinite mercy accepts this substitute for an atonement, and its blood in lieu of his, its main organs in place of his, the portions (of the sacrifice eaten by the priests) so as to sustain the teachers of the Torah that they may pray for him. Accordingly, the daily sacrifice is offered up because of the masses who are constantly caught up in the web of sin. This explanation is plausible and appeals to the mind even as the expositions of the Aggada.¹³

I agree with Nachmanides that his answer is more plausible and is not contradictory to the Torah, but his answer is still found lacking. Here we must remember the words of the Brit Chadasha,

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4)

If the author of the book of Hebrews is correct that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins, then we must ask why the Holy One instituted such a practice. The answer is simply proclamation. The sacrificial system being described in the book of Leviticus is simply part of

the Torah, which is the image of Elohim. The Torah is the self-revelation of YHWH. To this end Torah is the very image of Elohim. When Elohim created man, Adam was in the image of Elohim.¹⁴ Adam was created as living TORAH. When Adam violated the Torah¹⁵ he diminished the Torah and desecrated the image of Elohim.¹⁶ By giving the children of Israel the Torah, YHWH was seeking to restore His living image to the world. By keeping the Torah, the children of Israel would embody YHWH in the world. So it is that obedience to the Torah is a matter of proclamation.

The Feasts of YHWH,¹⁷ the *mo'adim*¹⁸ and the *mikra*,¹⁹ are all shadow pictures of good things to come.²⁰ The sacrificial system likewise is a matter of proclamation. What we shall see in the many and diverse offerings and sacrifices performed by the *cohanim* at the altar are shadow pictures of the Messiah. Here we must be careful not to fall into a common trap. Many believers look to the sacrifices and then try to discover how Yeshua's sacrifice conforms to the Levitical sacrifices. This way of thinking is backwards. Yeshua's priesthood is the foundation for the Levitical priesthood, just as Yeshua's sacrifice is the foundation to which all of the Levitical sacrifices must conform. Yeshua's sacrifice is the true sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world. All of the other sacrifices mentioned in the Torah point to Messiah. Thus the reason that YHWH instituted the sacrificial system is to point our faith to Yeshua the Messiah and Savior. As the Apostle Shaul declared,

"For Messiah is the end²¹ of the Torah for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Romans 10:4)

Let us now turn our attention to the Torah portion Vayikra. One of the first things we should take note of is the fact that all offerings are given in the name of YHWH and not Elohim. Here we must remember that the names YHWH and ELOHIM are descriptions of different attributes of the Holy One. ELOHIM is describing the attribute of righteous judgment, while YHWH describes the attribute of mercy. It is YHWH the merciful one that receives all the sacrifices and offerings. We should recognize from this that grace did not begin with the New Testament. As we have already stated, the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin, yet YHWH shows Himself merciful to accept these inferior offerings in the stead of Messiah until that time comes.

We should also note that the first three offerings made are not sacrifices, but offerings. The Hebrew word is *korban*. These three offerings are all voluntarily given. YHWH declares,

"If any man of you bring an offering unto YHWH, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before YHWH."
(Leviticus 1:2-3)

There are several key words in this verse that will help us to understand the purpose and intention of each of the various offerings. The root of the Hebrew word translated in the KJV as "bring" is the word *karav* (Qof, Resh, Vet), which means "draw near." The word translated as "burnt-offering" is the Hebrew word *olah* (Ayin, Lamed, Hey), which means "ascent" or "elevate." In these two words we realize that the purpose for bringing a burnt offering was to

demonstrate one's intent and desire to ascend to new spiritual heights and to draw near to YHWH. This offering is sometimes referred to as the "whole" burnt-offering because everything is burnt upon the altar. Unlike the other offerings, there is no benefit in the way of meat or hide to the *cohanim* or to the giver. Thus the giving of the whole burnt offering is the demonstration of giving oneself wholly to YHWH. Clearly this is a picture of Yeshua, who, as Shaul declared,

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Messiah Yeshua: who being in the form of Elohim, thought it not robbery to be equal with Elohim: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8)

The second offering is the meal offering. This offering is made with fine wheat flour, oil, and frankincense. Like the whole burnt offering, this offering also points to the life of Messiah. The unleavened fine flour speaks of Messiah's purity and sinless nature. This flour may be presented in various fashions, one of which is referred to as *matza*, which Yeshua spoke over at Passover and declared to be a symbol of his broken body.²² These other means of presentation are baked in an oven or in a frying pan, and both speak of the trial by fire that Yeshua endured at the hands of sinners. We should also note that all of these meal offerings were to be anointed with oil, just as Messiah was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

The third voluntary offering of our portion is the peace-offering. This offering is one that brings *shalom* – peace and wholeness. We should note that unlike the whole burnt offering, everyone benefits from this sacrifice. The fat and innards are offered upon the altar, but the meat is eaten by the *cohanim*, the givers of the offering, and those that are invited to share in the feast. Once again we see a picture of Messiah who offered himself for the sake of peace and reconciliation. Here we should remember the words of the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Shaul, who wrote of the Messiah:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty Elohim, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace." (Ephesians 2:14-15)

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." (Colossians 1:19-20)

The next set of offerings are prescribed offerings. The first of these are the sin offerings. We should note very quickly that all of these offerings are for unintentional sins. We should also note that there is a descending and variable pattern to this offerings.

“If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of YHWH concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against of any of them: if the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto YHWH for a sin offering.” (Leviticus 4:2-3)

“And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of YHWH concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; when the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.” (Leviticus 4:13-14)

“When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of YHWH his Elohim concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish.” (Leviticus 4:22-23)

“And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of YHWH concerning things which out not to be done, and be guilty; or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned.” (Leviticus 4:27-28)

We should see that the *Cohen Gadol* brings a bull for his sacrifice, while the common person brings only a kid of a goat. This is to teach us that the *Cohen Gadol* is held to a higher standard than the common person, because he has been given the responsibility of setting the example for the whole congregation. We also should note that if the whole congregation sins, it is to bring a bull just as the *Cohen Gadol*. This is because the whole congregation is called to be a kingdom of priests,²³ and is therefore to live at the same standard as the *Cohen Gadol*. In addition, the king and the commoner both offer a kid of a goat for their sins. This is teaching us that the king is no different from anyone else. The king is not above the Torah. Again we are reminded that the blood of bulls and goats does not take away sins, but only the blood of Yeshua HaMashiach.

Finally we come to the guilt offerings. Here we encounter a completely different pattern. Torah prescribes that the offering be either a bull, a lamb, two turtle doves or pigeons, or even a tenth part of an ephah of fine flour. The correct offering was determined not by the sin committed but by the ability of the sinner to make the offering. This is Torah's way of teaching us that we are only accountable for what we are able to do, and not for what we are incapable of doing. A rich man is expected to give more; a poor man less. YHWH will not judge us for what we do not know or what we were incapable of doing. Our judgment will be based upon what we do

know and could have done. It is being responsible with what we have. This is a comfort to those who have never heard the truth of the Torah. Will Elohim judge our parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbors who have been raised in the Church and taught to violate the commandments of YHWH? No! He will not judge on what they do not know. However, for those who know the truth and continue to walk in sin, violating the commandments will be the basis of their judgment. Once we know, we are responsible.

We should also take careful notice that there is no sacrifice for intentional sin. The prescribed course of action for intentional sin is equally intentional repentance. Our portion gives us a very clear four-step prescription for intentional sin: 1) Confession, 2) Repentance, 3) Restitution, and then 4) an Offering. We have all from time to time fallen prey to our fallen nature. We have all on occasion sinned in a most intentional manner. This does not mean we are without hope. The Proverbs declare,

“For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” (Proverbs 24:16)

YHWH does not delight in the death of sinners, but desires that all would repent and live.²⁴ Yes, even the intentional sinner is shown mercy by YHWH. But let us be clear that this teaching is not cheap grace. The Torah teaches that we must first admit to our sin and confess it. But this is not the end. We must then repent of our sin. Repentance is the act of turning away from sin and then returning to the keeping of Torah. But even repentance is not enough. We must also make restitution. It is restitution that makes the repentance real. The Torah demands that we bear the fruit of repentance by making right our wrongs and by blessing our victim with a fifth more. Only when all of these conditions have been met can the intentional sinner once again offer an acceptable sacrifice. There are no shortcuts to this process of restoration. What we learn from this is that every sin is against another person and against YHWH, therefore it is not enough to simply confess to YHWH how sorry we are. We must reconcile with our wounded brother first before we make our offering. We must do all in our power to correct our error and heal the wound in the body of Messiah before we come to YHWH asking for His forgiveness. Some key Hebrew words in this regard are *teshuvah* (repentance in the sense of returning to the keeping of Torah) and *tikkun* (to repair what was damaged). I would suggest looking at the example of David in Psalm 51 for a classic example of *teshuvah* in action.

All that we shall learn throughout the book of Leviticus in the portions to come can be described as the boundaries of the image of YHWH and the body of Messiah. It is a sign of YHWH's love and grace that He begins this book with the assurance of forgiveness and restoration when we break these boundaries. I pray that it is in the heart of each one of us to offer up our living sacrifices in the hope of drawing near to the Holy One and serving Him with our whole heart, mind and soul.

SHAVUA TOV!

¹ Alphabet

² Pekudei Exodus 38:21-40:38

³ Vayikra Leviticus 1:1-6:7

⁴ *Cohanim* is Hebrew for “priests.”

⁵ Pertaining to the Levites

⁶ *Cohen Gadol* is Hebrew for “High Priest.”

⁷ Matthew 5:17ff

⁸ Renewed Covenant/New Testament

⁹ Exodus 19:5-6 cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10

¹⁰ Maimonides (1135-1204), born in Muslim Spain during the golden years of Spanish Judaism.

¹¹ Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Part III Ch. 32, New Studies in Vayikra Vol. 1, Nehama Leibowitz, (Jerusalem 1993)

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¹² Nahmanides (1194-1270), a late contemporary of Maimonides, was likewise born in Muslim Spain during the golden years of Sephardic Judaism.

¹³ New Studies in Vayikra Vol. 1, Nehama Leibowitz (Jerusalem 1993) Pg. 2

¹⁴ Genesis 1:26

¹⁵ Genesis 3:1-7

¹⁶ Genesis 3:7 By adding fig leaves, Adam changed the created image.

¹⁷ Leviticus 23

¹⁸ *Mo'adin* is Hebrew for “appointed times.”

¹⁹ *Mikra* is Hebrew for “rehearsal” or “convocation.”

²⁰ Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:4-5, 10:1

²¹ The Greek word is *telos*, which means “aim” or “goal,” and not “destruction” or “removal,” as some have erroneously taught. Shaul is teaching that Messiah is the aim or goal of the Torah for righteousness. Clearly removing the righteous law will not produce righteousness but lawlessness.

²² Matthew 26:26

²³ Exodus 19:5-6

²⁴ Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11