

The Gospel in Leviticus

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Preacher: Rev.Prof. F. Dalrymple-Hamilton

[0 : 00] Scripture now, and the first reading is as published in Leviticus chapter 5, beginning there at 14, and reading on to chapter 6, verse 7.

The Lord said to Moses, if anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unwittingly in any of the holy things of the Lord, he shall bring as his guilt offering to the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued by you in shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, it is a guilt offering.

He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing, and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priests. And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven.

If anyone sins doing any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity.

He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued by you at the price for a guilt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him, for the error which he committed unwittingly, he shall be forgiven.

[1 : 33] It is a guilt offering. He is guilty before the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, if anyone sins and 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 what was lost and lied about it, swearing falsely in any of all the things which men do and sin therein, when one has sinned and become guilty, he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by oppression, or the deposit which was committed to him, or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full, and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him, to him it belongs, on the day of his guilt offering.

And he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued by you at the price for a guilt offering. The priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things which one may do, and thereby become guilty. Now looking forward to Isaiah chapter 53, there at verse 10. Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him.

He has put him to grief. When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offering, he shall prolong his days, and the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

[3 : 49] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

Yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Finally, in the Gospel of John, and there at chapter 1, verse 29.

The next day, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel. And John bore witness. I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He in whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 14] And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God. Amen. May the Lord bless those three readings. May they be to his praise and to his glory.

Okay. We'll sing again from Matthew to the book of Leviticus and asking the question, Do we still need it? After all, all the sacrificial portions, one of which we read, have been fulfilled in Christ. Do we still need it? Well, yes we do. Because it's only when we understand what these offerings and sacrifices meant to the ancient Hebrews, that we can understand the depth of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

In the synagogue and the temple of our Lord's time, every child was required to memorize in Hebrew, Leviticus 1 to 16, and from Genesis right to the end of Numbers.

So they clearly took the view that this is still something to say. And it does. The purpose is stated in Leviticus 19, verses 1 and 2.

[6 : 34] The Lord said to Moses, Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

There are two aspects that the book of Leviticus seeks to deal with. The first of which is atonement, and it occupies the first 16 chapters.

The second is the theme of holiness, and that occupies chapter 17 to the very end. So, the first division, looking at this idea of atonement, the principal feast there was the day of atonement. And we consider that at Easter in Leviticus chapter 16. But in chapters 1 to 7, there are a series of five offerings. And the most important of these are said to be the sin offering and the guilt offering. So let's think about this guilt offering. If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unwittingly in any of the holy things of the Lord, he shall bring as his guilt offering to the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued by you in shekels of silver, according to the shekels of the sanctuary, it is a guilt offering.

[8 : 01] So the first question we've got to address is, what kind of sin did this apply to? And right in the first verse that we read, from Leviticus 5.14, it speaks of, if anyone commits a breach of faith.

Now the Hebrew word that's used here means, the verb anyway, be faithless, misappropriate, or commit apostasy.

So there's something more profound about this offering than just ordinary transgressions every day. And there are a number of different translations.

For example, the RASV reads, if a person commits a breach of faith. The NIV reads, if a person commits a violation.

The King James Version reads, if a person commits a trespass. And it's further qualified by, any of the holy things of the Lord. Now, the holy things of the Lord are those that belong to the priests.

[9 : 13] And the people in ancient Israel were required to do certain things for the priests. For example, they were required to bring portions of peace offerings.

They were required to assist them in their daily life by giving tithes. they were required to bring the first fruits of the ground, the firstborn of domestic animals.

But all of these, significant as they are, are not the offences that this particular noun deals with, this offering deals with.

And it's best illustrated by considering the sin of Achan in Joshua chapter 7. In the attempt to take eye, Achan committed treachery against the Lord by violating the rules of objects taken as spoil and devoted.

So, it says this in the very first verse of Joshua 7. But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things. For Achan, the son of Kami, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things, and the anger of the Lord burnt against the people of Israel.

[10 : 47] When we read that text, the definition of what Achan did is exactly the same as the definition contained in Leviticus 5, verse 14.

But it's more serious than defrauding the priests or the firstfruits that were due to them. This is the sin of apostasy. But there's another qualification here.

Levitical law gives a further qualification in order that this guilt offering may be presented. The sin must have been carried out unwittingly or inadvertently.

If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unwittingly in any of the holy things of the Lord, this is what this offering is here to deal with.

But it doesn't deal with deliberate sin against the Lord. If you read through the Levitical law, you find that there are no offerings that can be offered and be brought for the forgiveness of deliberate sin.

[12 : 03] And that's the case with Achan. There's no forgiveness for him. There's no forgiveness for Judas Iscariot. They had committed apostasy.

And so what was left was the penalty of death. All Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day.

So that the guilt offering has got to do with this sin of apostasy provided it's being carried out inadvertently.

Let's move on to Isaiah 53. It was the will of the Lord to bruise him. He has put him to grief. When you have made him an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hands.

Now the particular phrase that's of interest here, when you have made him an offering for sin. In other words, when the prophecy is fulfilled by the death of Jesus on the cross, this is not an accident.

[13:32] This is not down to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. This is down to the deliberate planning of God. And this is what Peter says in Acts 2.

This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and by the hands of lawless men.

So the death of Jesus is in the hands of God. That's what we would call the divine election, divine choosing. This is happening because God planned it.

When we come to look at the word in Hebrew, offering, it's the exact same word that occurs in Leviticus 5, verse 14, translated, guilt offering.

Not only is it the case that our Lord died in the direct plan of God, but in so doing, he became an effectual guilt offering.

[14:45] Now, there are important things relative to the offerings that are presented which the priests presented for sins. The first of these is a regular word for sin in connection with the sin offering, but that's not what this is about.

This is about a guilt offering. Now, what does that mean? If you read any of the contemporary modern evangelical scholars, you will find that they've renamed the guilt offering the remedial offering.

It deals with the consequences of sin. Now, Barry turned on his attention to Psalm 51, and we'll come to that in a minute. When it comes to the sin offering, David says this, blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered by means of the blood being shed on the altar. His sin is forgiven. But the guilt offering isn't like that, the remedial offering, because although the lamb is slain, the blood is not applied to the altar in this chapter or any other that the guilt offering is dealt with.

It deals with the consequences of sin. Now, we come back to David in Psalm 51. I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.

[16:25] Against you only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight. What had he done? In 2 Samuel chapter 11, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and this led to the sin of adultery.

in an attempt to cover this up, he then became guilty involved in the conspiracy to murder.

Now, these sins have consequences. Every time we sin, it has a consequence. In the Lord's Prayer version in Matthew, it there says, forgive us our debts.

It's got nothing to do with financial transactions. It's the idea that in Judaism at that time, when you sinned against God, you include a debt against him.

That's the idea that's there. Now, what can we say about that now? We require an offering that can forgive sin and undo the consequences and set us free.

[17:51] And that offering is to be found in the person of Jesus who died on the cross. Peter writes, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds, you have been healed. So we come to the third scripture of John the Baptist. John 1 and 29. The next day, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And here what John is saying is, thinking about these Levitical offerings, thinking about how necessary they are, he's now saying they've been superseded.

And in Jesus, there's not only forgiveness, there's the power to deal with the consequences of sin.

For the murderer, yes, God can forgive, but the murderer is faced with a number of consequences over which he can do nothing about.

[19 : 11] There's the bereavement of the family from which the victim has come. There's the possibility that they might be now be living in poverty because of this action being taken place.

John the Baptist is saying, in Jesus, he can deal with the consequences of sin. Let's look at John the Baptist for a minute.

They send to him from the temple, send to him priests and Levites. and this is the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you?

And in the next verse, he confessed and did not deny, but said, I am not the Christ. So the next question is, are you Elijah?

Elijah? In the Passover in the synagogue to this day, when it is celebrated, there is a vacant seat. And that vacant seat is there for the coming of Elijah, who will precede the Messiah in their thinking.

[20 : 29] It's based on Malachi 4, 5. I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. So, he says, no, I'm not Elijah.

Although, our Lord later in his ministry clearly identified John the Baptist as the coming Elijah. So then they go on. And their next question is, are you the prophet?

What they're talking about there is a prediction in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verse 15. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brothers.

Him you shall heed. John the Baptist says, no, I'm not the prophet. Who are you, they say?

Let us have an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? He says, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord as the prophet Isaiah said.

[21 : 46] So here he is, having emerged on the scene of time without any preparation as far as the contemporary world was concerned.

the voice of one that cries, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now listen, in the Judaism of that time, what could take away sin wasn't a person, it was an offering.

Hence, when Jesus continually says to the man who is lame, in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin, he said to him, take up your bed and go home.

And he went out before all. And of course, the Pharisees, no, we're not having this. Who is this that forgives sins? This is only God can do this. But that's his message.

[22 : 52] And as we study the Gospel of Luke, we find it was given to him this ministry by the promise of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to his father Zechariah and said this, But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son, and you shall call his name John.

You will have joy and gladness, for he will be great before the Lord. And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

God. So, what his ministry is relying on is the promise of God. God said it.

And the second is the power of the Spirit of God. And it's in that power that he goes around, pointing the finger and saying, this is the Lamb of God who can take away your sins.

And as we think about that this morning, this evening, we realize that we're in the same boat. We have the promise of God made to us, and the command of God that comes as a challenge.

[24 : 32] go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.

It's the challenge of the Word of God. It's the challenge of the age. It's the challenge of the world outside in Wetherhill's housing estate.

It's up to you and I to respond to that challenge and point men and women to the one who can not only deal with their profoundest problem, but set them free.

So here we are, having spoken about the guilt offering in the book of Leviticus, how that it deals with the consequences of sin. we're not looking for an offering anymore.

We're looking for a person, and that person is in our midst tonight. Jesus said to them and to us, go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.

[25 : 51] He who believes and is baptized will be saved. he who does not believe will be condemned. Let us take this challenge into our hearts, live it, and see it work for God's glory.

We'll sing the final hymn, Would You Be Free From Your Burden of Sin. Amen. Amen.