Mention Leviticus and people often moan in sad anticipation. Rules, regulations, commands, and mystical rituals all come to mind. Paragraph after paragraph deal with various sacrifices, vows, clean and unclean things, leprosy and more. Just reading through Leviticus tends to give the average reader the shivers and a headache.

Yes, Leviticus is full of detail and lays out the practice of a culture that our contemporary religious culture does not understand. To many, if not most Believers, the religious practices of Israel remain a mystery. For too long these important practices have been ignored, either by design or by accident. Some see symbolism or metaphor in these ancient practices as the only way of making them relevant to faith.

To those who believe Torah to be relevant to Messiah-faith, Leviticus can still be confusing and intimidating, but that does not have to be the case. By careful study and prayer Leviticus can come alive to us. By asking the Holy Spirit to guide us in our study Leviticus can bring a new understanding of the work of our Messiah and put our faith on solid ground. So, relax, open up the Bible, take off your shoes. We are about to walk on some very Holy ground.

In *The Sound of Music* is a little song that has the words, “Let’s start at the very beginning, that’s a very good place to start.” Some basic concepts need to be in place before understanding Leviticus.

First, Leviticus is the middle book of the Torah—in our Bibles. In the original it is somewhere in the middle of a large scroll with no chapter and verse breaks and no book breaks. In other words, what we call Leviticus is a continuation of Exodus, which is a continuation of Genesis. Leviticus then flows into Numbers, which flows into Deuteronomy.

Simply put, this section, Leviticus, is a part of a larger work. Themes may vary and subjects may vary, but it is all part of one work. Leviticus happens to fall into place following the construction of the Tabernacle and carries a main theme of Holiness. Which may be one of the reasons many avoid the book.

Second, there is a confusion between law and sacrifices. So, a few things about sacrifices need to be cleared up. In the Sacrificial system there does not seem to be a sacrifice for intentional sin. To the Jewish mindset there were two categories of sin, intentional and unintentional. Intentional sin is sometimes called “high handed” or “great” sin. This is sin that is intentional, done on purpose, knowing it is a direct violation of God’s will.

Unintentional sin is just that, unintentional. It is accidental sin, sin perhaps of ignorance or confusion. Unintentional sin can range from forgetting to do something to involuntary manslaughter.

An important note here. Ignorance of the law—like not knowing the speed limit—is not an excuse for breaking the law. To speed unintentionally still carries the guilt and punishment of speeding. Likewise, just because we violate the law of God out of ignorance, does not mean we are free from the guilt and punishment of the violation.

The sacrificial system provides a remedy for unintentional sin. There appears to be no remedy for high handed, or intentional sin. Now, this is where the law comes in. Law and Sacrifice are different things. Law tells us what sin is and the results of doing that sin. Paul’s comments in Romans 5:13 sums up the purpose of the law—to point out what sin is.

Third, is to determine what true discipleship, true Believer-ship is.

How do we know what to do to please God and what not to do to avoid His wrath? This is a touchy area we enter, like an open wound to the touch. Depending on feeling and emotion as the only way to determine God’s will is shaky. Yes, the Holy Spirit can convict of sin, and the Holy Spirit can direct and illumine. Even then there must be a way of knowing for sure this emotion or feeling is directed by the Holy Spirit, which can never contradict or change the actual Words of God.

When feeling and emotion direct us to act in a way not acceptable in God’s Word, it is wrong. Some will argue that the coming of the Holy Spirit the law has been put into our hearts, and that is true, but with borders and limits. Just because I am filled with the Spirit does not mean I can cheat, lie, kill, maim, or sleep around in the name of grace.

Without the Word of God, interpretation and resulting behavior is dependent on something inward that cannot be evaluated. The person who claims God has spoken a new word or new prophecy is saying they have something special that the rest of humanity does not have. How is that evaluated and tested if we do not have some absolute against which to measure it? If the absolute is feeling or emotion, there is no authentication and no rule.

The law tells us what sin is and the sacrificial system speaks of redemption. The law defines the two types of sin. The sacrificial system reminds us of how to redeem ourselves from one type of sin, the unintentional sin. Against this limited atonement, we need an answer for full atonement. We need a Messiah! More about Messiah later.

So where did that leave the Israelite that committed a high-handed sin? At this point, something happens that boggles our minds and gives us heartburn. If someone intentionally, on purpose, with forethought and design, committed a high-handed sin they were put under the law, more specifically, the curse of the law.

The sacrificial system is about keeping relationship with the Holy and restoring that relationship if an unintentional sin is committed. To do the high-handed sin results in being cut off, exiled, excommunicated, or even death—depending on the specific violation. That ultimately means the commission of a high-handed sin cannot be erased or atoned for. The individual is sentenced to life outside of God.

God selected Israel to be the chosen people. To Israel they are already the children of God; called, set apart, redeemed. Their issue is keeping that relationship and being able to restore relationship when broken by unintentional sin. Why do we emphasize unintentional sin? Because once in relationship to God, once called, set apart, redeemed, no one with any sense would do something to violate that relationship.

This is an element of faith lost in the modern theologies and doctrines. Salvation—being called, set apart, redeemed—is the focus of the Christian movement. Obedience and holiness are secondary to salvation. Israel felt the same way. In their minds they are already “saved.” Keeping the relationship is now what counts.

Unfortunately, in the Christian movement man is not expected to maintain the relationship. Grace is supplied by God and man becomes a secondary figure with little or nothing to do with his spiritual development. The ultimate end is the belief that once saved, always saved, even in the case of high-handed sin.

For illustration purposes, Israel is the Believer. There should only be a need to restore and maintain relationship with the Holy.

Returning to the average congregation, how do we know what pleases God? How do we know what we should do in worship? How do we discover what God does not want us to do? It is not feeling, it is knowing. It is not emotion, it is understanding. Believer-ship will, once redeemed, focus on maintain that relationship with the Holy. That relationship is dependent on God’s Word.

Finally, a word about ritual. Ritual explains what the culture believes. Ritual comes from culture. To understand the culture of the ancient Jew, and the roots of our intended culture, we must understand the rituals. This will require some suspension of belief. In other words, we must put ourselves in the sandals of the Jew at Mt. Sinai, set aside that which we have learned in our Western teachings, and simply seek to know the God of the ritual.

Not all sacrifices have to do with sin. Each sacrifice serves a purpose for man. There are burnt offerings and offerings of praise and thankfulness. To know each sacrifice is to gain understanding in how man relates to a Holy God. Once we allow ourselves to stand at Sinai and hear these things for the first time, then we can come to a fuller understanding of what those elements mean for us today.

Once we understand the sins, intentional and unintentional, we can fully understand the role of Messiah and what He did for us. The sacrifices only covered part of the sins, one part was left incomplete. Incomplete in that there exists no redemption, no restoration, for the high-handed intentional sin. Until…

Matthew 5:17 TLV  “Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

“Fulfill” is a translation of the Greek word that means to fulfill, to complete, or to cram full. Messiah did not do away with anything, but completed, filled out, and filled to the brim that which existed and still exists. The sacrificial system is complete.