

# Lesson 12: The Priesthood in Ancient Israel

## Reading Preparation:

- Leviticus 5-7; 10-11; 16

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## Lesson Notes:

### 1. Introduction to the Book of Leviticus

In the King James Bible, Leviticus is the third book of Moses. Like the book of Isaiah, its' message is often misunderstood by the average reader. It is easy for the reader to get so caught up in the minuscule details of the book that one misses the purpose behind the sacrifices and laws. The tragedy is that the Israelites as a people missed the purpose Moses and the prophets tried to teach them.

B/M, Mosiah 13:29-32

29 And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

30 Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

31 But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

32 And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.

These are the words of a prophet named Abinadi who lived upon the American continent. He understood the purpose for which the Lord had given the "law of performances or ordinances" to the children of Israel and what was going to be their response to the Lord's efforts to teach them the law of Moses preparatory to his great sacrifice. Abinadi further taught regarding the importance of keeping the law of Moses prior to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but clarified it was not obedience to the law that saves the individual, it would be Christ's atonement!

B/M Mosiah 13:27-28

27 ...I say unto you, that the time will come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.

28 And moreover, I say unto you that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God [Christ] himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.

Let us continue our desire to better understand the purpose of the Book of Leviticus.

The LDS Bible Dictionary states,

*"The book of Leviticus represents the priestly religious life of Israel. Its dominant thought is the presence of a holy God in the midst of a holy people dwelling in a holy land. Its object is to teach religious truth to the minds of men through the medium of a stately ritual, sacrifices representing the need of atonement and communion, the consecration of priesthood teaching the need of the consecration of the life of every worshipper who would draw nigh to God, and the law of clean and unclean teaching that God requires the sanctification of the whole man, body as well as spirit."* (LDS Bible Dictionary, in *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979, 724).

The purpose of the sacrifices and ritual is to teach the Israelites, through every aspect of their daily life, their need for the Lord's atonement which they are to look to in the future. In order for them to fully benefit from the Lord's sacrifice, it will be necessary for them to become clean, both in body and spirit. These sacrifices could only be done by those who have the requisite authority from the Lord to act. Otherwise, the sacrifice would be invalid. Those who will perform the offerings and sacrifices must follow the Lord's direction with exactness.

Ellis T. Rasmussen observed,

*"Leviticus was the priesthood handbook of the Levites and the Aaronic priests. It contains laws concerning offerings of animals, incense, and foods-laws given to the Israelites 'to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him' (Mosiah 13:30)." (A Latter-Day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 127).*

Without the constant daily reminders, it would have been easy for the children of Israel to forget their God as they focused on meeting temporal needs and complied with the required ordinances and laws. But we must remember the underlying purpose of the law was their spiritual preparation.

Victor L. Ludlow states,

*"Without the message of Leviticus the key event of all time, the [Atonement and] death of Jesus Christ, is an enigma... As the sacrifices were performed day after day, year after year, as the Day of Atonement came and went, Israel was constantly reminded of the sin which cut them off from God's presence... But God in his mercy showed them that he would accept a substitute—the death of an animal, perfect and blameless, instead of the offender... The laws of Leviticus show God working in harmony with his own natural laws for the good of his people."* (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 33).

Once we begin to understand the spiritual purpose of the sacrifices and ordinances, then the Book of Leviticus takes on greater meaning for us as individuals.

Kent P. Jackson observes,

*"Leviticus... is perhaps the most Christian book in the Old Testament, since it teaches better than any other book the consequences of sin and the redemptive nature of vicarious sacrifice... Leviticus teaches better than any other book the Justice of God, while at the same time it teaches that his Mercy is provided so his children can reenter his presence. It is the Gospel of the Old Testament."* ("The Law of Moses and the Atonement" in *Studies in the Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 155).

## 2. Outline of the Book of Leviticus

In the following outline prepared by Victor L. Ludlow, he states the underlying spiritual focus of the sacrifices and ordinances.

- "Chapts. 1-7: The symbolism of the sacrifices directed Israel toward Christ.
- "Chapts. 8-10: The example of Aaron and his sons taught them about service.
- "Chapts. 11-15: The laws of purification kept them physically and spiritually clean.
- "Chapt. 16: The Day of Atonement forced them to annually evaluate their lives in preparation for the final day of judgment.
- "Chapts. 17-25: The code of holiness distinguished them as a peculiar people, in the world but not of the world.
- "Chapt. 26: The promises and vows between the Lord and his people guaranteed them a special eternal relationship."

(Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981,32).

### 3. The Priesthood in Ancient Israel

As we noted earlier, one of the consequences of Israel's rebellion was that the Melchizedek Priesthood was not made available to them. From that point on they were mainly governed by the lesser authority and ordinances of the Aaronic Priesthood although Moses did hold the higher priesthood.

Doctrine and Covenants 84:25-27

**25 Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;  
26 And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;  
27 Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John.**

From this revelation received by Joseph Smith on September 22 and 23, 1832, we receive further clarification regarding the loss of the Holy Priesthood and the meaning of the lesser priesthood. It is important to understand other than with the prophets and a few others, the Holy Priesthood was not upon the earth from the departure of Moses until the coming of John the Baptist.

Kent P. Jackson states,

*"The priesthood of ancient Israel is called "Aaronic" after Aaron, its first High Priest. It is sometimes called "Levitical" since it was held exclusively by the tribe of Levi. All men of that tribe were entitled to priesthood authority." ("The Law of Moses and the Atonement," in Studies in Scripture , Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 157).*

Kent P. Jackson defines the three offices that were held by those who functioned in the "Aaronic or Levitical" priesthood. They are the: (a) High Priest, (b) Priests, and (c) Levites.

#### 1. "The High Priest

*He presided over the tabernacle (and later the temple), its sacrifices, and other functions of the priesthood. He was the presiding authority in the Aaronic Priesthood. The High Priest's position was to pass from father to firstborn son throughout all the generations of Aaron's descendants. Thus there was to be only one at a time holding this office. The position of High Priest of the Aaronic Priesthood should not be confused with the office of High Priest in the [Holy Priesthood] Melchizedek Priesthood in the Church today. This office is not the same as the position of High Priest in Israel's Aaronic order.*

#### 2. "The Priests

*They performed the sacrifices and fulfilled other priesthood functions under the direction of the High Priest. These are the rest of Aaron's male descendants.*

#### 3. "The Levites

*They were chosen to assist the priests in their duties. This group included all the rest of the men of the tribe of Levi. Just as with the other two Aaronic Priesthood offices, this was a hereditary position, passed on from father to son."*

*("The Law of Moses and the Atonement," in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 157-158).*

### 4. Offerings of the Israelites [Lev. 5-7]

In Leviticus 5-7, we learn of seven specific offerings. These include: (1) burnt offering; (2) meal (meat or food) offering; (3) peace offering; (4) sin offering; (5) trespass offering; (6) drink offering, and (7) wave offering. It will be important for us to focus our attention on the symbolic significance which each of these sacrifices represent as we review the meaning of each offering.

#### 4.1. The Burnt Offering

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

*"This is another name for the ordinance of sacrifice practiced by the patriarchs from Adam down to Israel. It was to be a male animal without blemish... [o]riginally the animal was to be a firstborn...The animal used varied according to the position and personal possessions of the individual, as well as the occasion of the sacrifice: bull, ram, he-goat, turtledoves, or two young pigeons...This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father."(Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 162).*

The purpose: “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7). It represented the spotless sacrifice of the Savior.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual adds the following to the purpose of the burnt offering,

*“[The sacrifice represents] the quality of the life which the Lord lives. His feelings, thoughts, activities, and whole life were placed in submission to God. At the same time, the sacrifice stressed the idea that only when the offerer yields himself to God is his life sweet or satisfying to the Lord.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 165).*

Public and Private offerings

Victor L. Ludlow states,

*“Under the law of Moses there was a burnt offering of lamb each morning and each night on behalf of all Israel (Ex. 29:38-42). The morning sacrifice was to burn all day, and the evening sacrifice was to burn all night (Lev. 6:9). The priest were to see that the fire of the altar was kept burning perpetually (Lev. 6:13).” (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981,34).*

Along with Public offerings, there were also private offerings.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual notes,

*“Private offerings were given for family events—birth, marriage, reunions, etc., and at times of personal need. Most often, private or individual offerings were given during the times of appointed feasts.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 162)*

#### **4.2. Meal (Meat or Food) Offering**

Victor L. Ludlow provides the following clarity regarding this offering,

*“While today the term “meat” implies flesh, this offering was of the fruits of the field...This offering took several forms, usually it was in the form of fine flour that would be given raw or as baked cakes. The ingredients of the offering included flour, oil, frankincense, and salt. Honey and leaven were not to be used. Only a “memorial” or portion of this offering was burnt upon the altar. The main part of it was to be eaten by the priests and their families.” (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 34-35).*

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual provides the following insight regarding the symbolic meaning of the “meat offering,”

*“Through this offering the individual acknowledged God as the giver of all things and surrendered what had been designated as truly his (that is, the fruit of the field) in supplication for power to fulfill his duty (Lev.2). Wheat, or products made from wheat, with the addition of oil, frankincense, and salt constituted each offering...In each case the wheat had to be prepared in some way. “Fine flour” required the greatest effort in an age when grain was ground mostly by hand. Thus the offerer’s time, symbolic of his whole life, was invested in the offering...The bringing together of the oil, frankincense, and grain in this offering is instructive. Oil was used in the scriptures to symbolize the Holy Ghost (D&C 45:56-57), grain to symbolize the word of God (Mark 4:14), and frankincense to symbolize prayer (Rev. 8:3). As a man was meant to live physically by eating bread, so too was he meant to live spiritually in Christ by partaking of the word and spirit of the Lord through prayer.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 165).*

When was this offering given?

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

*“This offering was always given with the burnt offerings and peace offerings and could even substitute for a sin offering in the stress of poverty (Num. 15:28,29).” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 163).*

#### **4.3. Peace Offering**

Victor L. Ludlow explains,

*“This offering “involved the slaying of an unblemished animal, either male or female. A portion of the animal was burnt upon the altar producing a “sweet savour offering. This was an offering shared by the altar of God, the priest, and the family of the person making the offering. It was a feast of conciliation, a feast of communion, a feast of thanksgiving. The sacrificial victim could be chosen from among the cattle, the sheep or the goats. As the animal was brought to the door of the tabernacle, the owner laid his hands upon its head and offered a prayer of*



thanksgiving. Therefore this offering is sometimes called a thank offering. After the animal was killed at the altar, the kidneys and internal fat were burned on the altar. The breast and the right thigh were given to the priest after they had been waved in the direction of the tabernacle, thereby signifying that it had been given of God and was now conferred upon his servants (Lev. 7:28-34). The rest of the meat was eaten by the offerer and his family at a so-called "sacrificial meal, or meal of "thanksgiving" (Lev. 7:15-16)." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 35).

Purpose of the "peace offering"

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual explains,

*"The threefold purpose of peace offerings is suggested in the designation of the particular offering: (a) Thank offering: Given to thank God for all blessings (Lev. 7:12-13, 15, 22-29); (b) Vow offering: The taking or renewing of a vow or covenant (Lev. 7:16), and (c) Free-will Offering (Lev. 7:16): Voluntary receiving of covenants with attendant responsibilities and consequences. An individual could seemingly give the offering for any of the above declared purposes separately or together." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 162).*

Symbolic meaning:

Keil and Delitzsch notes,

*"[The sacrifice] denotes the entire round of blessings and powers, by which the salvation or integrity of man in his relation to God is established and secured. The object of the shelamim was invariably salvation: sometimes they were offered as an embodiment of thanksgiving for salvation already received; sometimes as a prayer for the salvation desired; so that they embraced both supplicatory offerings and thank-offerings, and were offered even in times of misfortune, or on the day on which supplication was offered for the help of God." (Commentary, 1:2:299; see also Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 166).*

Old Testament Institute Student Manual continues,

*"It came to represent the consecration of the whole life of the individual to God." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 166).*

#### **4.4. Sin Offering**

Victor L. Ludlow explains,

*"The sin offering consisted of slaying a young, unblemished bullock and then burning part of it upon the altar and the rest of it upon a fire 'without the camp.' This did not product a sweet savour unto the Lord.*

*"This offering was made for sins committed in ignorance but subsequently discovered. It was for offenses that could not be undone or repaired. If the offering could be repaired, a trespass offering was made. The ritual for a sin offering varied according to the rank of the offender." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 35).*

Old Testament Institute Student Manual adds,

*"...the priest offered a bull (Lev. 4:3; Num. 8:8); the ruler among the people: a he-goat (Lev. 4:22-23); the people in general a she-goat (Lev. 4:27-28); the poor two turtledove or two young pigeons (Lev. 5:7), and those of extreme poverty an offering of fowl or meal (Lev. 5:11, Num. 15:20-21)." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 163).*

Victor L. Ludlow continues,

*"One distinction of the sin offering from the regular burnt offering was the disposition of the blood. The priest smeared the blood of the victim on the horns of the altar of incense inside the tabernacle and then poured out the rest at the base of the brazen altar of sacrifice outside. On the annual Day of Atonement the distinctive aspect of the sin offering was the fact that the priest took some of the blood into the holy of holies and sprinkled it before the mercy seat. (Lev. 16:14)." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 35-36).*

Specific meaning:

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Hebrews offers further insight as to the meaning of this offering,

Hebrews 13:11-13

**11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.**

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the  
people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.  
13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp,  
bearing his reproach.

James E. Talmage states,

*"It is noteworthy that the city of Jerusalem at the time of Christ was surrounded by a wall. Once the crucifixion pronouncement had been given, Jesus was led "[along] the city streets, out through the portal of the massive wall, and thence to a place beyond but yet nigh unto Jerusalem..." (Jesus the Christ. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 654).*

Thus, his crucifixion occurred "without [outside] the gate," where he, sanctified "the people with his own blood." He shed his blood that the sins of all who have lived or will yet live will have their sins atoned for, both those known and unknown. Should we not now accept his sacrifice for us and follow his teachings?

Edward J. Brandt adds,

*"The purpose of sin offerings, after true repentance on the part of the parties involved, was to prepare them to receive forgiveness as a part of the renewal of their covenants. (Lev. 4:26, 35; 5:10; 10:17; Num. 15:24-29). This same blessing is possible by [our] partaking of the sacrament today [JST, Matt. 26:24.]" (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 163).*

The importance of blood in this offering:

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual observes,

*"The Lord chose blood to dramatize the consequences of sin and what was involved in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Therefore, blood symbolized both life (Lev. 17:11) and the giving of one's life. Death is the consequence of sin and so the animal was slain to show what happens when man sins. Also, the animal was a type of Christ. Through the giving of His life for man, by the shedding of his blood, one who is spiritually dead because of sin can find new life...It is the blood of Christ which covers sins and makes man pure so that he can receive at-one-ment with God. Thus the blood was a symbol for the whole process by which man becomes reconciled with God." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 164).*

This is certainly one area where the unsophisticated might miss the symbolism of the blood and even come to believe it was the blood sacrifice on the altar that brought reconciliation from transgression thereby missing the very purpose of the use of blood.

Bruce R. McConkie notes,

*"From all of this it is apparent that those in Israel who were spiritually enlightened knew and understood that their sacrificial ordinances were in similitude of the coming death of Him whose name they used to worship the Father, and that it was not the blood on their altars that brought remission of sins, but the blood that would be shed in Gethsemane and on Calvary." (The Promised Messiah. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978, 258).*

#### [4.5. Trespass Offering Or Guilt Offering](#)

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

*"The offering was to be a ram without blemish (Lev. 5:15, 18; 6:6); a leper was to offer a lamb (Lev. 14:12), and a Nazarite was also to give a lamb (Num. 6:12).*

*"Trespass offerings were given for offenses committed against others: i.e., false testimony (Lev. 6:2-3), forceful and unlawful possession of property (Lev. 6:4), disrespect for sacred things (Lev. 5:16-17), acts of passion (Lev. 19:20-22). The purpose of the trespass offering was to bring forgiveness (Lev. 6:7) This was possible after repentance (Lev. 26:40-45) and after fulfilling the law of restitution that required, where possible, that the guilty individual restore completely the wrong and an additional 20 percent (Lev. 5:16; 6:5-17; 27:13, 15, 19, 27, 31; Num. 5:6-10)....All trespass offerings were private and personal offerings, most commonly given at the times of the appointed feasts." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 163).*

It is important to understand the children of Israel were taught before their repentance was complete, it was necessary that, where possible, restitution was required. It is common in our day to forget this important requirement and to assume personal recognition and regret are the only necessary elements of gaining forgiveness.

Andrew Jukes offers the following clarification,

*"Now the distinction between the Sin and Trespass-offerings is just this:—the one is for sin in our nature [i.e., the "natural man"] the other for the fruits of it... Thus in the Sin-offering no particular act of sin is mentioned, but a certain person is seen standing confessedly as a sinner; in the Trespass-offering, certain acts are enumerated, and the person never appears. In the Sin-offering I see a person who needs atonement, offering an oblation for himself as a sinner; in the Trespass-offering I see certain acts which need atonement, and the offering offered for these particular offences." (The Law of Offerings. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1976, 148).*

We might say today that the Sin offering is for acts of omission, while the Trespass offering is for our acts of commission. In other words, the sin offering is for those acts that we commit, but we are not consciously aware. The trespass offering is for those acts which we commit and are conscious of our acts. In this manner, there is no particular act of sin mentioned in the Sin offering as the sinner is unaware of his transgression, while the individual offering a Trespass offering knows exactly the acts of for which he is guilty and is seeking contrition.

#### **4.6. Drink Offering**

Victor L. Ludlow offers the following insight,

*"It is used to express thanksgiving to the Lord. It consisted of the fourth part of a hin of wine (Lev. 23:13), or about three pints. This offering was simply a libation poured out before the Lord. This offering occurred every morning and every night along with the burnt offering and the meal (meat or food) offering (Ex. 29:39-40)." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Deseret Book Co., 1981, 36).*

It is important to note this offering was poured out on the base of the altar (like the blood of other offerings) before the Lord. The substitution of the wine in place of the blood "as in other offerings" may be the forerunner of today's sacramental offering.

JoAnn H. Seely offers further insight regarding the drink offering,

*[This offering occurred] "[a]t the conclusion of the morning and evening sacrifice. [The pouring of the wine [was followed by] the Levites beginning to sing, pausing for the trumpets blown by the priests, which signaled the people to bow down in worship... The daily sacrifices and offerings were doubled on the Sabbath, and additional sacrifices and drink offerings were made on new moons and feast days all of which were in addition to the individual votive and freewill offerings." ("The Fruit of the Vine: Wine at Masada and in the New Testament," in BYU Studies, Vol. 36, Number 3, 1996-97, 213).*

It is important to note the priests do not drink this wine, but instead it is poured out upon the altar. It is an offering unto the Lord signifying both the thanksgiving of the people and the individual for blessings received.

#### **4.7. Wave Or Heave Offering**

The final offering is the "Wave or heave offering."

It is given "by the offerer for the services of the priests." You will recall it is the responsibility of the tribe of Levi to care for the tabernacle and to perform all the necessary rituals and offerings that are required by the Lord on behalf of his people. This offering reimburses the priest for the services they render to the community.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual explains,

*"The wave offering is the breast of the peace offering animal and the heave offering is the right shoulder given in payment by the offerer for the services of the priest.*

*"Whatever the Levites received for their priesthood service—heave or wave offering, meat offering, or tithe (Num. 18)—they were required to offer to the Lord in sacrifice a portion as a memorial offering (Lev. 2:2, 9, 16; 5:12; 6:15; Num. 5:26; 18:26-29).*

*"Heave" or "wave" refer to gestures of lifting the offerings up and extending them toward the priest who received them on behalf of the Lord. This is the priest's portion (Lev. 7:35-36; Deut. 18:1-8).*

*"This memorial offering was a type of peace or thank offering to the Lord, as well as a remembrance of God and service to him.*

*"The Levites also received the hides of all the animals sacrificed for their labors and services (Lev. 7:8).*

*"These were given at the times of burnt offerings and peace offerings.*

*"These were given at the time the offerings were given..."*

*"It was to signify that these choice parts of the sacrifice were first presented to God (symbolically transferring to the Lord) and then back again, representing God's acceptance of the offering and its transference to his servant the priest." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 163, 169).*

As we review the intricacy and complexities of the minutia of the offerings, we can easily become overwhelmed. It is understandable that one might ask, "What is the purpose again of all these offerings?"

W. Cleon Skousen states,

*"In the days of the patriarchs, animal sacrifices had been very simple. They were made with only one purpose in mind and that was to point toward the great sacrifice of the Son of God in the meridian of time."*

PGP, Moses 5:5-8

5 And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

6 And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

7 And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

8 Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.

*"Now, however, the carnal commandments made these sacrifices a rigid teaching device, an attention-holder, a gargantuan burden of ritualistic mechanics designed to form habits of obedience."*

*"It is clear from a number of scriptures [see Isaiah 1:11-15] that the Lord yearned for the day when His children would grow up spiritually so that all of these ritualistic crutches could be thrown away" (The Third Thousand Years. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964, [12th printing], 341-342).*

Unfortunately, it would take the children of Israel many years before they would be able to walk without crutches, but for now they were necessary.

## 5. Importance of Laying On of Hands

An important part of "every sacrifice," was the laying on of hands, which involved the one who was offering the sacrifice to place his hands upon the offering. The process of laying hands upon an object is in order to transfer the identity of the individual upon the sacrifice.

Alfred Edersheim states,

*"This meant transmission and delegation, and implied representation; so that it really pointed to the substitution of the sacrifice for the sacrificer. Hence it was always accompanied by confession of sin and prayer." (The Temple: Its Ministry and Services [Updated Edition] . Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1994, [Sixth printing-June 2004], 81).*

We learn the symbolic meaning of the process.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual provides further insight,

*"This practice shows that the sacrifice had a dual aspect or symbolism. First and foremost, it represented the only sacrifice that could ultimately bring peace and remission of sins, namely that of Jesus Christ. But the laying on of hands showed a transfer of identity; that is, the offered put his own identity upon the sacrificial animal. Thus, the slaying of the animal implied symbolically one of two things, depending upon the kind of offering. First, it implied that the sinful self, the "natural man," as King Benjamin designated it was put to death in order that the spiritual person could be reborn"*

B/M Mosiah 3:19

19 For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.



*"Second, if it was not a sin offering, the death of the animal would imply a giving up of one's life, that is, a total sacrifice of one's self to God." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 164).*

## 6. The Atonement of Jesus Christ

We cannot discuss the process of sacrifice and offering without addressing their purpose. The very purpose was to point the children of Israel and all who would come unto the Lord, toward the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Kent P. Jackson states,

*"The atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ was the theme which undergirded the entire idea of sacrifice in the Old Testament, including the sacrifices of the Law of Moses. Sacrifice as a function of worship was symbolic of the Atonement, and the sacrifices were meant to teach the principles upon which the Atonement was based... Sadly, through most of Israelite history apostasy had removed that understanding from the worship of Israel, and the Old Testament is silent regarding the sacrifices' true meaning ." ("The Law of Moses and the Atonement of Christ," in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 161).*

We repeat the words of Bruce R. McConkie,

*"From all this it is apparent that those in Israel who were spiritually enlightened knew and understood that their sacrificial ordinances were in similitude of the coming death of Him whose name they used to worship the Father, and that it was not the blood on their altars that brought remission of sins, but the blood that would be shed in Gethsemane and on Calvary." (The Promised Messiah. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978, 258).*

James E. Talmage wrote:

*"Christ's agony in the garden is unfathomable by the finite mind, both as to intensity and cause... In some manner, actual and terribly real though to man incomprehensible, the Savior took upon Himself the burden of the sins of mankind from Adam to the end of the world" (Jesus The Christ. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 613).*

What is the atonement and why is so important to everyone?

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

*"The word translated 'atonement' comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'to cover over or hide.' The connotation is not that the sin no longer exists but that the sin has been covered over, or more scripturally, blotted out before God through his grace or loving kindness.*

B/M, Alma 7:13

**13 Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sin of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.**

*That is to say, the power of sin to separate man from God has been taken away (see Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary, 1:2:276). Thus, the word at-one-ment was used to show that man becomes one with God again." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 164).*

It is being separated from God because of our sins and then becoming one with Him again.

## 7. Justice and Mercy

We cannot fully understand the atonement unless we are able to understand two important principles upon which it is based.

Kent P. Jackson states,

*"The doctrine of the Atonement is based on two important principles established by God: Justice and Mercy:*

*"Justice:*

*"The principle that requires an appropriate punishment or penalty for every violation of God's commandments. It is firm and irrevocable.*

*"The principle of Justice is taught forcefully in the Mosaic system... Justice requires that for every violation of the law there be an appropriate penalty or punishment received... Probably no religious system in world history has*

emphasized Justice so strongly.” (“The Law of Moses and the Atonement,” in *Studies in the Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 167, 170).

Kent P. Jackson continues,

*Alma taught us regarding the “role of Christ’s Atonement in satisfying the demands of Justice.*

B/M Alma 42:15

**15 And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice,..**

“Mercy:

*“The proposition that the penalty for violation of God’s laws can be paid by someone else in our behalf. Under the Father’s plan, Mercy is made available by one who is innocent—Jesus Christ—suffering in place of those who are guilty...This allows the guilty ones to be made pure, and it satisfies the demands of Justice without having thee guilty ones suffer the eternal penalty themselves—if they repent.” (“The Law of Moses and the Atonement,” in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 168).*

D&C 19:16-17

**16 For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;  
17 But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;**

Kent P. Jackson continues,

*“It is the principle of Mercy, which allows one to pay the penalty in behalf of another. In the Law of Moses, Mercy is taught clearly in the animal sacrifices. Recall that the Burnt, Sin, and Trespass Offerings had as their purpose the symbolic removal of sin from the lives of those who initiated the sacrifices....The animals paid the penalty in behalf of the guilty person, thus teaching the principle that underlies Christ’s atoning Mercy in behalf of others.*

*“The symbolic meaning lies in identifying the one making the sacrifice with the victim, for it symbolizes the death of the sinner. The penalty for sin is death, but the animal dies in place of the sinner...God and Father of Jesus Christ is a holy God, offended by sin, who requires that blood be shed to remove sin. He has provided the substitute “lamb” in the person of his own Son, through whom has come “atonement.”...Without understanding the language and symbols of Leviticus, how can one fully understand the deepest meaning of the New Testament?” (“The Law of Moses and the Atonement,” in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 171-172).*

Having reviewed the various sacrifices and their symbolic meaning, it is hoped the reader has a better understanding of the hidden meaning found within the Lord’s purpose for imposing the animal sacrifices with their accompanying details upon the children of Israel.

## **8. Nadab and Abihu / Eleazar and Ithamar [Lev.10]**

Nadab and Abihu along with Eleazar and Ithamar are sons of Aaron. Their names are known to us unfortunately due to their disobedience, rather than their righteousness. We learn about their actions, I believe, so we may learn disobedience has consequences without regard to family relations.

Nadab and Abihu:

Leviticus 10:1-2

**1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.  
2 And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.**

These two sons of Aaron, while acting in the office of the Aaronic priesthood had acted inappropriately to their office in opposition to the commandments the Lord had given.

Daniel H. Ludlow observes,

*“Some biblical scholars have suggested that the insertion at this point (Lev. 10:8-11) of instructions against strong drink might indicate that intoxication might have been involved in their actions.” (A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 165).*

The death of their two sons must have been great for Aaron and his family to bear, however, as we learn there was a second penalty the family had to bear.

Leviticus 10:6

**6 And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his [other] sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled.**

In other words, the two brothers [Eleazar and Ithamar] are not allowed to mourn the death of the brothers!

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual offers the following reasoning,

*“... Aaron’s other sons were forbidden to officially mourn the death of their brothers, for this action would imply that the Lord had been unjust in the punishment.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 169).*

Another possible explanation for the severe action which the Lord took regarding the two brothers and the action imposed upon their other brothers may be in response to the following verse.

Leviticus 10:10

**10 And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;**

It was necessary those who served the people regarding holy matters were held to a higher law than those who did not have this responsibility. When they were lax in how they handled holy matters, the most severe penalty was enacted. There could be no deviation when it came to the sacred performance of their priesthood duties.

Eleazar and Ithamar:

Moses now becomes upset with two other sons of Aaron. They do not follow the prescribed direction for the disposal of the sin offering as priests. They are to eat the meat of the offering, and instead they burn the offering.

Leviticus 10:17-18

**17 Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it to you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord?  
18 Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place: ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded.**

The two sons of Aaron deserved the rebuke from their Prophet/Uncle. It is their responsibility to be obedient to the procedure the Lord has prescribed without deviation. We are not to trifle with the holy. Aaron, after listening to Moses’ rebuke of his sons, offers the following explanation in their defense.

Leviticus 10:19

**19 And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord; and such things have befallen me: and if I had eaten the sin offering to day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord?**

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

*“The excuse which Aaron makes for [their] not feasting on the sin-offering according to the law is at once appropriate and dignified; as if he had said: ‘God certainly has commanded me to eat of the sin-offering; but such things as these have happened unto me, could it be good in the sight of the Lord? Does he not expect that I should feel as a father under such circumstances? With this spirited answer Moses was satisfied; and God, who knew his situation, took no notice of the irregularity which had taken place in the solemn service.’ (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 169).*

God in his mercy understands the grief of a father who has recently lost two of his sons due to their iniquity and the accompanying need of his remaining sons to grieve the loss of their brothers by not eating their portion of the sin-offering. Mercy superseded the law of Justice.

## [9. Clean and Unclean Food \[Lev.11\]](#)

As we read in Leviticus, Chapter 11, about the laws regarding clean and unclean things, it is important we continue to look beyond the outward commandments and rituals for what they were meant to teach about spiritual realities.

While there were practical reasons for these laws related to health and sanitation, one Orthodox Jewish author noted that kosher (the Hebrew word for what fits or meets the demands of the law) means far more than just cleanliness:

Herman Wouk states,

*“A hog could be raised in an incubator on antibiotics, bathed daily, slaughtered in a hospital operating room, and its carcass sterilized with ultra-violet rays, without rendering kosher the pork chops that it yields.” (This is My God: The Jewish Way of Life. Revised Edition, New York: Pocket Books, 1974, 100-101, in Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 173).*

As noted above, “clean” and “unclean” means more than physically clean. Some have argued that the rationale behind the dietary laws given the children of Israel was in response to the primitive conditions that existed. It was necessary for the Lord in order to protect the people from the effects of spoilage or food not being cooked at sufficient heat to destroy bacteria, that the designation of “clean” and “unclean” animals was necessary. While it is true the conditions were primitive, certainly by today’s standards, this was not the primary reasoning for the designation. The primary reason is that it is yet another way for the Lord to teach the importance of individual spiritual purity and obedience to the Israelites if they are to enter into the presence of the Lord.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual reminds us,

*“God used the diet of the Israelites as a teaching tool. People may forget or neglect prayer, play, work, or worship, but they seldom forget a meal. By voluntarily abstaining from certain foods or by cooking them in a special way, one made a daily, personal commitment to act in one’s faith. At every meal a formal choice was made, generating quiet self-discipline. Strength comes from living such a law, vision from understanding it. Further, the law [would serve] to separate the Hebrew from his Canaanite neighbor. Each time he got hungry he was forcibly reminded of personal identity and community bond. Indeed, he belonged to a people set apart. The law, therefore, acted as a social instrument for keeping the Hebrew nation intact, a psychological instrument for preserving the identity of the individual, and a religious instrument for keeping the people in remembrance of Jehovah.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 173).*

Today in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, we also have a law of health. It is entitled, “The Word of Wisdom.” While most understand the health benefits that are derived by obeying its precepts, it is highly possible the greatest benefit is spiritual. The Lord may have given this dietary guidance knowing that abiding by its principles would set the individual apart from others thereby making them a peculiar people, just as the dietary laws regarding clean vs. unclean food did for the Israelites.

## [10. The Day of Atonement and Israel’s Forgiveness \[Lev.16\]](#)

Keil and Delitzsch state,

*“The Day of Atonement, which took place in the fall of the year, was the most sacred and solemn of all the Israelite festivals. In it we most clearly see the typology or symbolism of Christ’s work for Israel. It was a day of national fasting and one that signified that the sins of Israel had been atoned for and that the nation and its people were restored to a state of fellowship with God.*

*“The feast included the following major items:*

- 1. “The high priest had to go through meticulous preparation to be worthy to act as the officiator for the rest of the house of Israel (Lev. 16:17).*
- 2. “The high priest put off the official robes he normally wore and clothed himself in simple, white linen garments (Lev. 16:4). (See Rev. 19:8 for the significance of white linen garments.)*
- 3. “Two goats were chosen by lot. One was designated as the goat of Jehovah, and the other as the “scapegoat,” or in Hebrew, the goat of Azazel.  
“The goat of Jehovah was offered as a sin offering, and the high priest took its blood into the holy of holies of the tabernacle and sprinkled it on the lid of the ark of the covenant (called the ‘mercy seat’), thus making atonement for the sins of Israel.*
- 4. “The other goat, Azazel, was brought before the high priest, who laid his hands upon its head and symbolically transferred all of the sins of Israel to it. Then it was taken out into the wilderness and released where it could never be seen again. One commentator explained the significance of Azazel by saying that it represented ‘the devil himself, the head of the fallen angels, who was afterwards called Satan; for no subordinate evil spirit could have been placed in antithesis to Jehovah as Azazel is here, but only the ruler or head of the kingdoms of demons.’ ((C.F.Keil and F. Delitzsch. Commentary on the Old Testament, Bk. 1: The Pentateuch; see also Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 176).*



Gerald N. Lund states,

*"The apostle Paul in the book of Hebrews drew heavily on the typology of the Day of Atonement to teach the mission of Christ.*

*"(a) Christ is the great High Priest (Heb. 3:1) who, unlike the high priest of the Aaronic Priesthood, was holy and without spot and did not need to make atonement for his own sins before he could be worthy to officiate for Israel and enter the holy of holies (Heb. 7:26-27). His perfect life was the ultimate fulfillment of the symbol of wearing white garment*

*"(b) The true tabernacle (or temple, or house of the Lord) is in heaven, and the earthly tabernacle made by Moses was to serve as a shadow or type of the heavenly one (Heb. 8:2-5; 9:1-9).*

*"(c) Christ is the Lamb of Jehovah as well as the High Priest. Through the shedding of his blood he became capable of entering the heavenly Holy of Holies where he offered his own blood as payment for the sins of those who would believe in him and obey his commandments (Heb. 9:11-14, 24-28; 10:11-22; D&C 45:3-5)". ("Old Testament Types and Symbols," in A Symposium on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 187-88)*

James E. Talmage taught,

*"God has never refused to accept an offering made by one who is authorized on behalf of those who are in any way incapable of doing the required service themselves. The scapegoat and the altar victim of ancient Israel, if offered with repentance and contrition, were acceptable by the Lord in mitigation of the sins of the people." (The Articles of Faith. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924, [Forty-second Edition, 1961], 77).*

It is important to remember when the children of Israel offered their sacrifices on the altar or their sins were transmitted to the scapegoat, when offered with repentance and contrition, their sins were forgiven as if the final sacrifice of Our Savior, Jesus Christ, had been offered. Until that time however, Israel was to continue to abide by the law of Moses and to offer their sacrifices looking forward to that final and great sacrifice.

## **11. Conclusion**

What appears at first to be only a series of outdated laws given as part of the Mosaic covenant upon closer examination carries a powerful message to Saints of all ages. If we are to be God's people, we must become different from other people. We must be set apart, or separated from the influences of the world. To ancient Israel, God gave commandments not only to help them remain physically and spiritually clean but also to help them to look to the Atonement of the Savior himself.