

LEVITICUS

Lesson 4 - Chapter 2

In Leviticus chapter 1, we looked at the sacrificial ritual call in Hebrew '**Olah**.....what we typically translate as the "burnt offering". And we saw that this offering concerned the burning up of animals, from Bulls, to Sheep, to birds and this burning was to be complete....nothing was to remain.

In Chapter 2 we get a second type of offering, and it too is going to be kind of burnt offering in the sense that it is going to be burned up on the Brazen Altar. But this sacrifice is not an offering of animals, of blood, but rather of plant life. Specifically it is grain.....even **more** specifically it's to be semolina, the best part of the grain.

We are going to be more technical than usual in our studies over the next several weeks as we learn about the various sacrifices. This is not just for eggheads and Rabbis to learn. The various kinds of sacrifices have various purposes because sin and atonement are not as simple and neat as we have made it out to be. It is a great travesty perpetrated by a church too eager to dumb everything down for the lay person, where we get these sorts of simplistic thoughts that a sin is a sin is a sin, and God neither classifies them nor grades them. That essentially stealing a candy bar is no different than armed bank robbery in God's eyes. By the time we're done with Leviticus, however, the awful and multi-layered and multifaceted nature of sin and redemption will be much more clear; but it will require a sacrifice of you giving this your best time and attention because if you kind of doze off a bit it will pass you by and you'll miss the deep spiritual importance of it all.

Open you Bibles to Leviticus chapter 2.

READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 2 all

I mentioned last week that the '**Olah**, the burnt offering of an animal, was often done in combination with other types of offerings. In fact the daily burnt offering at the Temple was, as far as records can tell us, ALWAYS followed with the sacrificial offering we're about to study.....the grain offering. The two were almost always done as a pair.

Now just as '**Olah** is the specific Hebrew name for the burnt offering of an animal as described in Chapter 1 of Leviticus, the sacrificial offering in Chapter 2 is in the original Hebrew called **Minchah**. Often, Bibles will translate this type of offering into the word "meal".....making this a meal offering. And that is correct.....except that in our 21st century world "meal" to us more often means breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Not that long ago the word "meal" most often referred

to ground grain, like in corn meal, which is the context here. However just to confuse things a little more, some Bible translations have used the word “meat” to describe this offering. The KJV does that, and no one is quite sure why it was done that way. That is, the KJV and a few translations based on the KJV call the grain offering the “meat offering”.....even though it is specifically an offering of grain and not any kind of animal meat. I suspect that the reason for this has to do with resolving a word translation problem that surfaces in the story of the dispute over an offering to God between Cain and Able, which eventually led to Abel’s death at the hand of Cain. I’ll explain in just a moment. But, for those of you who have it rendered “meat offering” in Chapter 2, make it easy on yourselves and cross out “meat”, and write in “grain”. Meat is just flat inaccurate at least as far as what the word “meat” means to the modern world.

So, the **Minchah** is an offering of the choicest part of the grain, the semolina, which is then ground, turned into a dough, and then burned up on the altar. The usual translation of “fine flour” is also not correct.....this is not flour that has been well sifted making it “fine flour”, nor is the best flour. Rather, the offering is of flour made of the absolute best part of the head of grain itself.....the semolina. But, the word **Minchah** also has an interesting history, as it did not always refer to this grain offering that we’re now studying; in fact, **Minchah** is the word used in Genesis 4 verses 3-5, in conjunction with the incident between Cain and Abel when they each brought a sacrifice to God, but one was acceptable, and one was not. The acceptable offering, the acceptable **Minchah**, was Abel’s, and it was an animal. The unacceptable was Cain’s and it was of plant life....probably grain. But in BOTH cases, the offering was referred to as a Minchah. That is because in its first usage, Minchah could mean just “sacrifice” in general and not a specific kind.

That is really kind of ironic, isn’t it? Because the Minchah that was acceptable to God in Genesis was an animal....God refused the Minchah of grain. I suspect this is what threw the translators of the KJV off track....how could God refuse grain but accept animal meat in Genesis, but now in Leviticus accept grain? So, they probably just called this the “meat offering” to solve the problem. Rather, over a period of a couple thousand years, we see that the use of the word Minchah has transformed to the point that it has NOTHING to do with the offering of an animal, and instead is ONLY the offering of grain. In fact, it is the specific name of the grain offering.

Now, the history of this word Minchah fits very well with what the great sages and Rabbis had to say about the meaning and purpose of the grain offering: that is, that it refers LESS to WHAT is offered (grain), and MORE to the PURPOSE it is offered. In other words, its not so much about it being grain, as it is that it is meant as tribute, or a gift to God. So in both of the first two types of sacrifices we’re studying, the **’Olah** and now the **Minchah**, part of their basic essence is that they are **gifts** to God. But, they are also REQUIRED gifts.....which is the nature of tribute. When we think of the term “tribute”, historically we think of a long line of conquered people placing “gifts” of appeasement as a sign of submission before the conquering King. And that is closer to the sense we are dealing with here in Leviticus for the Minchah sacrifice.

Another little interesting aspect of the Minchah is that it eventually came to be offered primarily in the evening or late afternoon. And, as a result, the word “Minchah” doubled as term that indicated not only the grain offering, but also referred to a specific time of day. If you study

Jewish tradition you'll find that the time of late afternoon prayers is called the time of "Minchah" or "Minchah prayers".....meaning these are ritual prayers always given in the late afternoon.

Unlike the '**Olah**, the burnt offering, the **Minchah**, the grain offering, offered only a small portion of the grain to be burnt on the altar, the rest was used as food. Recall that the 'Olah required that ALL of the meat be burned up on the altar.

The finely ground semolina and oil, olive oil, were the primary ingredients for this sacrificial offering. And the mixture could be offered in a number of ways, even cooked or uncooked. Leviticus specifically states that if cooked, the dough can be baked in an oven, cooked on a griddle, or cooked in a pan.

When the dough was baked in an oven it could be accomplished in a couple of different ways with different outcomes. And in vs. 4 we see that oil could be added to the dough, and this would produce a thick, round cake. The Hebrew term used here for this result is "**Challah**".....if you like to celebrate the Sabbath the traditional Jewish way, you will find yourself purchasing a loaf of **Challah** bread, although today it is in the shape of a loaf instead of round. This is where the term comes from. The other outcome for the dough baked in an oven is called "**rakik**", which are thin, crispy wafers. After the baking of **rakik** is accomplished then the required oil is spread on top. But, in both cases, it is to be of UN leavened dough because nothing containing leaven is ever to be burnt on the Brazen Altar.

Let's also not overlook that back in vs. 2, God commands that frankincense is to be added to the dough. Frankincense was rather expensive, and it was used to make a pleasing odor, a nice aroma. Incense burning was a common practice in the Middle East, and was not just for religious ceremony.....it was used more often to mask the odors associated with farm life, and with bathing only occasionally. So one might ask why Frankincense would be added to the dough.....because it is not really explained. To the Middle Eastern mind of the day, explanation would not have been necessary. They well knew what it is that I told you last week, that in every type of offering that was burned up on the Altar, it was the SMOKE that was of primary importance. All smoke caused by a ritual to the Lord had a certain quality of it being incense. Why? Because to people of that era God lived far away.....way up high into the clouds and beyond.....so the smoke rose up into the atmosphere and eventually reached God. When He smelled the aroma, it was pleasing to Him. Adding Frankincense made the aroma all the more pleasing. We'll find in later sections of the Old Testament, as well as the New, analogies made between prayer rising up to God and the smoke of burning incense doing the same. These analogies are to be taken quite literally.

Salt was to be added to the dough. Salt was to be added to every type of grain offering (for there are other types of offering involving grain that we will look at in the coming weeks). Yet we find that both honey and yeast are prohibited. Let's look at these elements because all throughout the rest of the Bible, New Testament and Old, we're going to see references to yeast, leaven, honey, and salt. And the symbolism of these things have been terribly misunderstood and misused.

First, let's deal with salt. The use of salt had both practical and spiritual implications. Going back to Genesis we find that salt is used as part of a covenant making ceremony. How this all began has been argued by scholars, going back even before Jesus.... yet, general agreement has recently been reached as to its use and meaning. We're going to deal a little with some Hebrew phrases here to help get to the bottom of this issue.

In verse 13 we're told that ".....you are to season every grain offering with salt.....do not omit from your graining offering ***the salt of the covenant***.....". Actually we're told that ALL sacrificial offerings were to be salted. The Hebrew phrase for salt of the covenant is " melach berit 'eloheika".....melach is salt, berit is covenant, and eloheika refers to God, as it is a form of the word elohim. And, it is a phrase that is really kind of an idiom.....that is, it is a Hebrew expression. It refers to a binding obligation to God, and one in which salt ***must*** be used in remembrance of that binding obligation. We call that binding obligation a covenant.

So, why salt? It appears the use of salt as both a component of making a treaty, and breaking a treaty goes back well before the time of Moses. We have records showing that often if a treaty was broken, the recommended consequence was that the offending party would have large volumes of salt sprinkled in their fields, thereby making them unusable. We also see salt used in rituals involving hospitality to guests. So, the using of salt, here, seems to be simply making use of a well understood element of making agreements, in use since time immemorial in the Middle East. The allegorical uses of "salt" that we have heard in sermons over our church lifetimes don't seem to have much basis in fact. We simply need to take this statement in Leviticus at face value.....that God employs this ancient custom to help his people, Israel, understand the binding nature of His covenants with them; and it is also made clear that the use of salt in sacrifices is NOT optional. That it is actually, from God's point of view.....which is the one we should concern ourselves with.....a sign that the worshipper agrees with God and intends on upholding God's covenants.

So, when we read in later chapters of the Bible, NT included, of the use of salt either directly or as an illustration, it is meant to be taken as either an indication of a permanent and sacred covenant to which you agree to adhere, or it is used to indicate salt which has become waste....it has been used up and serves no further purpose. How can salt become "used up" and therefore no longer useful? The salt used in heavy quantities at the Bronze Altar upon which on the large chunks of meat from the sacrificed animal would be placed. You see one of the many practical uses of salt was its absorbent value. Salt was spread on the chunks of sacrificial meat before they were placed on the altar to absorb any blood that was left; then it was shaken off onto the ground. The same procedure was generally also required when preparing meat for food. Blood from sacrificial animals was supposed to be drained completely from the animal, captured in a container and splashed on the sides of the altar; but it was NOT to be burned up along with the meat. The meat was to be drained as much as possible of its blood. And, this goes back to one of the 7 Noachide Laws that prohibited the eating of blood. Let's remember, priests or worshippers, with certain specified sacrifices, COULD eat some of the sacrificed animal meat. So, the meat had to be fully drained of its blood, and they didn't have rolls of Bounty paper towels yet, to do that.....that was one of the functions of the salt.

And, of course, there had to be mountains of salt that was used at the altar to absorb the blood

from the incredible number of animals sacrificed daily; and that waste-salt needed to be disposed of. So, after the Israelites entered Canaan, and many Israelites began living in cities and villages, they threw the blood-soaked salt....no longer fit for use.....on pathways and roadways. This fulfilled the command that whatever blood was not splashed on the Brazen Altar was to be poured out like water on the ground. So this waste salt, polluted with blood, served the useful purpose of poisoning the ground to keep vegetation from growing on a path or roadway.

Now, let's discuss leaven, yeast. This is another of those topics from which much preaching has been done, and much presupposition spoken, concerning the spiritual meaning of the prohibition of leaven in sacrifices and on household food during Passover, Pesach. The reality is that the Bible gives us no concrete explanation as to its significance. The rather consistent statement that leaven represents sin is not supported in the Bible.....it's at best an educated guess that does SEEM to have merit.

The use of leaven in the Bible is all over the map; while leaven cannot be used in sacrifices that are burned up, it IS used, interestingly, in other kinds of religious ceremony including the 12 loaves of Showbread that are placed inside the Tabernacle, near the veil which separates the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. And, yeast was perfectly acceptable to be used in Hebrew cooking and baking, except on certain specified occasions.

The only real mention of WHY no leaven can be used has to do with Passover; and the Bible states it is because it is a remembrance of that day that Israel hurriedly left Egypt, and so brought prepared unleavened dough with them, because there was no time to allow it to ferment and rise. Otherwise, its prohibition is a sheer mystery. But understand that the prohibition of using leaven in some cases and not in others it is NOT based in tradition.....it is a Biblical God-ordained command.

Now as for the prohibition against using honey: the Hebrew word that is usually translated as "honey" is **devash**. And, it is thought that while **devash** CAN refer to honey, it really refers more to other sweetening agents; the most common of which, in Biblical times, was from date sugar or fruit nectar. In fact there is no evidence at all that the use of beehives to collect honey was even used in those days. The story of Sampson finding a honeycomb in the bones of a dead lion is more the norm. That is the finding of a hive and the honey it contained was purely luck and a happy event. Bees would congregate in splits in trees, rock crevices, and yes, the skeletal remains of large animals.....this was more natural. And so that's where honey would be found, but it was pure serendipity to find honey, and it was greatly prized. So when we see the word "honey" in the Bible, don't get hung up on thinking that what was meant was honey from bees. Except in the rarest of instances **devash** was simply referring to something that added a sweet taste to food.

Why then couldn't honey be used on the sacrifices? One of the problems we have with the most ancient of Biblical commands like this one, is that there is NO explanation offered. So rather than be skeptical we have to approach such rules with common sense; statements that were simply common knowledge for people of that bore no need for explanation. A thousand years from now, historians may ask why Americans tend to eat sandwiches for lunch. And they may

not have a good answer, because I can't think of modern novel or a fast-food advertisement that would bother to explain WHY eating sandwiches is appropriate, and what cultural significance there was to eating sandwiches, and what the history of sandwich eating is and whether there is anything symbolic about eating a sandwich. We do it because we do it. It's just an unquestioned part of our culture that developed and was widely adopted. It's that way with MANY Biblical commands. And, the prohibition against the use of honey, or a sweetening substance, is not explained; so, you can bet it required none to people of that day.

Now the great Middle Ages Rabbi Maimonides offered an answer that does hold some water; and it is that in every other ancient Middle Eastern culture known, in fact honey WAS used.....it was CALLED for.....in religious activities (particularly in sacrifices to gods), simply because it was so rare and valued. Therefore, God's prohibition for the Israelites AGAINST the use of honey in sacrifices was to separate Israel's behavior and rituals from all others. Whether this is true or not, we'll just have to wonder. But I can tell you that as time goes on, more and more I see that so much of what God prohibits for His followers is merely because people who are **not** His tend to value it. And as we go about our walk with the Lord, we need to factor that principle into our decision-making.

So, to summarize: honey and leaven are NOT suitable, by God's command, for use on the sacrificial altar. But, they ARE suitable as offerings "set before" God....that is, offerings that are NOT burned up and therefore these prohibited substances do not wind up in the smoke that is emitted from the burnt offering.

The ritual of the grain offering (the Minchah) went like this: first, the worshipper prepared the dough. Then he either cooked it in one of the prescribed ways, or it was left uncooked. The product was next brought to the Tabernacle (later the Temple) and handed to the attending priest. The priest would take a handful and put it on the Brazen Altar, where it would be consumed with fire. In fact, the "handful" the priest took was quite small.....the Hebrew word is verse two which is translated usually as a "handful" is komets. And, the sense of the word is that it is not only a small portion, but a VERY small portion. The remainder of the grain offering was given to the priests to be used as their food, and they were required to eat it on the Tabernacle grounds.....that is, within the courtyard of the Tabernacle. This was considered a sacred meal.....in essence, they were dining in God's presence. Verse 3 says this portion given to Aaron and his sons, the priests was a Kodesh Kodashim.....a MOST holy portion. So, only a tiny amount was put on the altar, the rest was given to the priests. But, somehow, that tiny amount taken from the large clump of dough had a symbolic effect of making the whole amount, the entire clump of dough that was kept for food and NOT put on the altar, holy.

Now, I'd like you to turn quickly with me to Romans 11. Let's look at verse 16.

READ ROMANS 11: 16

Depending on your Bible version it'll say something like this: "Now, if the Challah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf". Other versions might say, "And, if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also....", and in others, ".....if the part of the dough offered as

firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump”. After studying Leviticus chapter 2, does this make a little more sense to you now? Paul, of course, is referring to the grain offering, the Minchah. The **Challah** is but the dough that has oil added, and baked in an oven. Leviticus tells us that that kind of bread is called **Challah**. He’s using this example of **Challah** that is the grain offering of the sacrificial system because it was perfectly understood by those Jews in the crowd he was speaking to. They well understood the grain offering procedure and the meaning that offering up that tiny little portion of dough on the altar transmitted its holiness to the WHOLE LOAF that would be eaten by the worshipper and/or priest.

This is but one minor example of the value of studying Torah and the sacrificial system; without that knowledge how could we understand what Paul is attempting to communicate?

Back in Leviticus 2, in verse 14, we are given a special use of the Minchah; it may be used during the harvest festival.....that’s the idea behind “firstfruits”.....that is, it is to be made from the first of the grain harvest. Now, this wasn’t just a single season. This could be performed several times when, for instance, the barley became ripe, and later the wheat..

When this grain offering was for the purpose of a firstfruits celebration, it was usually NOT done in combination with the ‘Olah.....the burnt offering of an animal. In other words, when the reason for the grain offering was to commemorate the grain harvest, firstfruits, it was a stand-alone sacrifice and not normally coupled with another kind of sacrifice. And, in this case, rather than the grain being stripped of its semolina, and then ground into flour and make into a dough, the grains were simply fire-roasted. The roasted whole grains then had olive oil and Frankincense poured on it, and it was presented to the priest who then took a small amount and threw it onto the altar fire.

So in Leviticus what is the meaning and purpose of the Minchah.....the grain offering? Really we don’t get too much help from the Bible on this subject. The most direct purpose for this offering is expressed in verse 2..... “it is a fragrant aroma for Yehoveh”. There is a direct link between the ‘Olah, the burnt offering of an animal, and the Minchah, the burnt offering of grain. And so much of it is expressed as being pleasurable to Yehoveh, and the pleasure resides within the fragrant aroma of the smoke.

Thus far we’ve seen that the Minchah is a gift to God; however it’s more along the lines of an involuntary gift, tribute, something ordained and expected by the all-powerful King. And, it is supposed to bring pleasure to God. Along with these, is also the idea of worshipper declaring his allegiance to Yehoveh, and the intent to obey Him.

Now, when one stands back a little and looks at this from a broader view, we already see a bit of a pattern emerging: the **‘Olah** is designed to gain God’s attention, and to get Him to look favorably upon the worshipper. In addition, the ‘Olah **maintains** peace between the worshipper and Yehoveh, and is also an admission of the worshipper that he has a corrupt nature that requires a means of reconciliation. Once this is accomplished, and the worshipper is put into good standing with God, then the grain offering is accomplished and it expresses thankfulness for God’s provision, at the same time acknowledging the worshipper’s dedication to Yehoveh.

Before we move on to Chapter 3, let me point out something here that I think might be worthwhile to our understanding of sin, forgiveness and atonement in general, and the concept of forgiveness of sins by means of Yeshua's sacrificial death on the Cross.

We often get these confusing theological debates on sin and forgiveness that brings us questions like; OK, so if Christ died once and for all for our sin, then why on the other hand does He tell us in His very own prayer model, the Lord's Prayer, that each time we pray we are to ask the Father for forgiveness for our trespasses? After all if these trespasses are ALREADY forgiven by the blood of Jesus what are we doing when we ask Him to forgive us for some newly committed sin, or bringing up an old sin over and over?

I think the answer is highlighted by the 'Olah and Minchah sacrifices.....and remember, this sacrificial system were are studying was fully operational when Christ was alive and of course He would have participated or he certainly would not have been considered a Great Rabbi...or even a common Jew in good standing.....by those who surrounded Him. We need to think of sin in a couple of planes: one is the sinful NATURE of mankind, and the other is in the sinful BEHAVIOR of mankind. That is, due to Adam's fall, we are all saddled with a sinful Nature. Even BEFORE that event man had the capacity (we call it "our will") to sin but an occasion to exercise that will in disobedience did not arrive until the Lord commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Hebrew sages characterize this nature to do wrong as the Yetzer Ha'rah.....our evil inclination that lives side-by-side with our good inclination. But, many people with sinful natures do an awfully good job of not sinning outwardly.....they guard their behavior carefully. Not perfect, but pretty darn good.

I'm sure I will draw some disagreement, but it seems to me that while our evil inclination is centered in our minds, our sinful nature is pretty much centered in our spirits or our souls, depending on how one defines spirit and soul. That is, we either have a corrupt spirit in us, OR we have a Holy spirit in us. We don't have a little of each, or none at all.....it's fully one or fully the other. We are born with a corrupt spirit and there's not a bloom'in thing we can do about it.....except to trust God and to put our faith in Jesus Christ. If we do that then we have our corrupt spirit replaced with a Holy and clean spirit. And, at that moment, our nature is changed. Yet, that evil inclination that resides in our minds remains and will haunt us until the day we go home. Now, the sad fact is that for a variety of reasons that my good friend Dr. Robert McGee has thought about and taught about in depth, a saved person often goes right on living like that exchange of spirits and natures never occurred. And, when that is the case, the saved person often continues sinful behaviors....that is, that person commits sins. Yet, again, that person's NATURE is now new, clean, and holy.

The concept of this strange conundrum that mankind lives out, is introduced to us here in Leviticus. Because the Olah (and to a degree the Minchah) sacrificial offerings are to atone for an inherent corruption within mankind that causes tension between man and God, these two sacrifices are NOT about atoning for sinful behaviors. These two offerings are NOT designed to atone for committing a specific violation of the Law of some kind. Rather, they're about dealing with man's sinful NATURE....with man's corrupted spirit. So far in the Levitical sacrificial system we have not encountered a sacrifice that is meant to deal with anyone's bad behavior.....with anyone's disobedience to Yehoveh's laws. Thus far the sacrifices have been

PURELY about God's justice system dealing with our very nature, which is reflected NOT in our behavior per se, but in the state of our spirits.....which, until Christ accomplished His work, could only be one condition.....corrupted.

So we have a sacrificial system being demonstrated by which there are two issues concerning sin and atonement that must be dealt with: 1) our acceptability to God, that nature of which is contained in our spirits, and 2) our trespasses, our sinful acts of lawless behavior against God.....two different things.

When Messiah died, first and foremost, His sacrifice accomplished in a much more grand and complete manner the purpose of the 'Olah and Minchah. His death, and our faith in Him, made us acceptable to God. His death allows us to approach Yehoveh. And, we will remain acceptable to Yehoveh regardless of our behavior.....at least unless our behavior is actually reflecting a heart that fully rejects God and His Son who is God.

But, our behavior **does** matter. God is watching our behavior. Obedience does matter. God is cognizant of our obedience or lack of it to Him. And, when we do misbehave, when are disobedient to Him, we are to ask for forgiveness out of obedience. Not because we have become unacceptable to Him because of some bad behavior.

This is why Christ tells us in the Lord's prayer to ask forgiveness for our trespasses.....our poor behavior.....our disobediences to God's commands.....NOT for forgiveness for our corrupted nature. Because the Lord's prayer is a prayer ONLY for the Believer who already has a NEW and clean nature, an acceptable nature, thanks to the finished work of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

And, the example, shadow and type of that particular aspect of God's justice system is given to us right here, in the first 2 chapters of Leviticus.