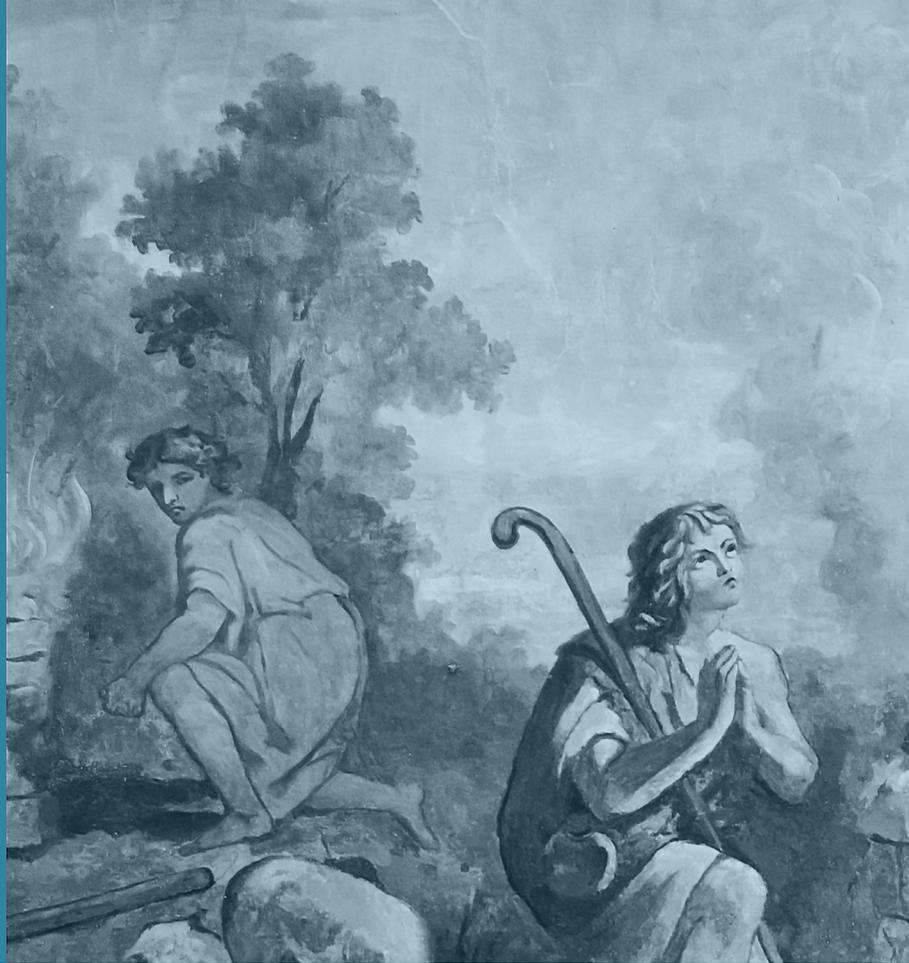


God Doesn't Want Your Sacrifice, He Wants You

Parashat Vayikra



Parashat Vayikra

This Shabbat we start the Book of Leviticus with Parashat Vayikra. Leviticus focuses on commandments, many of which are related to the sacrifices, the holy service in the Tabernacle, and the laws regarding the consecration of the priests.

It opens with an explanation of the variety of sacrifices, this includes voluntary offerings, sin offerings, and more. The very requirement that God had for different types of sacrifices, at different times, and for a variety of reasons, points to their importance in the worship of God.

Does God Favor Some Sacrifices Over Others?

Sacrifices appear all throughout the Bible, from the beginning of Genesis until the end of the Torah as well as the end of the New Testament. The first sacrifice was from Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's sons and it served as a backdrop for the first act of jealousy and murder.

This story also leads us to the question regarding the relationship between the quality of the sacrifice versus the intent of the one bringing the offering.

In other words, is it true that the greater the quality of the sacrifice, the more serious the intent? Or is it possible that there is no connection between the two?

Let's take a closer look at the story:

“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” – Genesis 4:3-5 [NIV]

Why did God not look upon Cain with favor in regards to his offering? Some commentators say that Abel brought offerings from the firstborn of his flock, the best animals he had.

However, in Cain's case, it was said that he brought some of the fruits of the soil, but not necessarily from the best of his crop. The commentators understand from this that there is a relationship between the quality of the sacrifice and the degree of intent shown by the one presenting it.

There are other commentators who interpret the text a little differently:

It does not say: “The Lord looked with favor on Abel's offering, but on Cain's offering he did not look with favor.” But rather it says: “The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.”

These commentators claim that the difference depends solely on the personalities of the individuals offering the sacrifices and not on the sacrifices themselves. Cain was unacceptable and therefore his offering was unsatisfactory.

Meanwhile, Abel was looked upon with favor, and in return, his offering was admissible. God's acceptance of a sacrifice is dependent upon the individual offering it, including his identity, intentions, and background.

God Doesn't Want Your Sacrifice, He Wants You

We tend to think that sacrifice is what brings atonement for our sins and that God will accept it every time. The purpose of sacrifice is to bring forgiveness, and the better and more costly it is, the greater the aroma will be to God.

In turn, He will be more satisfied and will forgive all our iniquities. This is also how we see Yeshua; He is our perfect sacrifice, the inventor of salvation.

God wants more than just the sacrifice, however, He wants the heart of the one offering it. What's important when sacrificing is the person's will, seriousness, and true intent. God examines the heart, and if a person's heart passes the test, God accepts the sacrifice.

As believers we tend to think that Yeshua's sacrifice is the most pure and desirable of all, and this proves true. However, this is only half of the equation. The other half is the identity and intent of the one offering the sacrifice and receiving salvation – our intent as believers.

Can God Reject a Sacrifice?

Can God reject a sacrifice? Is He able to reject fasting or prayer?

Indeed, Isaiah teaches us if our intentions and our hearts are not in the right place, then our fasting, sacrifices, and holidays are in vain. As can be seen in the following verses:

“The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?” says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to

me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!” – Isaiah 1:11-15 [NIV]

Do we think God wants us to celebrate His feasts and too keep His Sabbaths? Is it important to visit His congregation and to pray to Him?

In the passage God is saying to us: “Are you coming to the house of God? Why? Who asked this of you? Do not come, I do not want to see you.”

This is because all we do is an abomination: Shabbats, holidays, fasting, etc.

Isaiah spoke strongly in this section, and God is saying to us through him – we will pray, but He will not listen. We will offer Him a sacrifice, although He will accept nothing from us.

Isaiah goes on to lay out instructions for us in order to learn how to be acceptable in God’s sight once more:

“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” – Isaiah 1:16,17 [NIV]

We Must Sacrifice With Good Intent

Before we come to the congregation to stand before God, before we present to Him our prayer and sacrifice, before we say to God “in the name of Yeshua the Messiah,” we must come with good intentions.

We must stand before God after doing all we can to restore our relationships with one another in the community, between parents and children, employers and employees, etc. We must restore our relationships with others before we present our sacrifice and prayer before God.

Treating one another with respect goes way beyond religion:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” – Matthew 5:23,24 [NIV]

Offer a Sacrifice From the Heart

The part of this week’s parasha that touched me the most is where God commanded the people of Israel to offer a sacrifice to atone for their sins. Each person was required to bring a sheep, but if a person’s economic situation did not allow him to do so, God also allowed sacrifices of two pigeons. Again, if this was beyond financial means, God also allowed sacrifices of an ephah of flour. We find these instructions in Leviticus 5:6-12.

What I’ve learned through this portion is to be myself. I learned that it is essential to know what my limitations are, my strengths, and what I can give to God. If what we have to give is two pennies, then that is enough, just as it was enough for the old widow described in the New Testament.

In the eyes of God, she gave a donation to the Temple that was greater than baskets filled with gold, as they are given out of one’s excess.

When we stand in judgment before God, He will not ask us, “Why were you not more like Moses?” God will not even ask us, “Why were you not more like Yeshua?” despite the fact that we as believers often like to ask, “What would Jesus do?”, when we run into a difficult problem.

God will ask us, “Why weren’t you more like yourself? Why were not you more like the way I created you?”

In Conclusion

We must give our hearts as a sacrifice to God, and after that God will be pleased to receive from us the gifts we offer, the prayers, the holidays, the Sabbaths, and the days of fasting.

Going back to our point about salvation, Yeshua is the perfect sacrifice, and He is our savior. Yeshua alone cleanses our life from all sin and impurity, and presents us as pure and clean before God.

In order to receive the sacrifice of salvation, we must have good intentions.

All the commandments regarding sacrifices are based on this: God wants them only if they are given with good intent. The identity and the intent of the one offering the sacrifice is of utmost importance.

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