

Plan and Purpose Bible Study #III-19—Ordinances

We want to begin looking at laws that I feel come under the category of Ordinances in this lesson. As we said in our last lesson, these are laws that deal with rectifying the damage we do to God when we sin and the holiness of the tabernacle (later the temple). The first thing that God did here at Mt. Sinai in establishing a new nation was to establish an order of priesthood with Aaron, brother of Moses being the high priest. (Ex. 40:12-15) Ex. 28:1-43 tells us of this selection and gives us the “law” dealing with the garments that were to be made for the high priest and his sons to wear while performing their priestly functions. Verse 43 finishes by saying, **“it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him.”** As we discussed before in discussing statutes, this gives us a bit of a clue as to the difference between a Statute and an Ordinance. We could look at the type of clothing as described as part of the ordinances, but it was the responsibility of the people or nation to see that, 1) the priesthood remained in the house of Aaron from generation to generation; and 2) that the priests were provided and required to wear the type of clothing specified. Being the responsibility of the people then, it was called a statute.

Ex. 29:9 and 29:29-30 reiterate what we are told in chapter 28. Ex. 30:1-10 describes the incense altar that Moses was to build. Ex. 36, 37, and 38 describe the instructions Moses received from God for the building of the tabernacle. Please read these chapters on your own as we won’t go into the details of its construction. Keep in mind that it is basically a tent, but one that was to last for a long time. It had board sides that were covered with curtains of fine twined linen, then a covering of goat’s hair curtains, then a covering of ram’s skin died red, and a final covering of badger skins.

The measurements given are in cubits. However, if you look up a cubit in a Bible dictionary, you will find there is more than one cubit with varying lengths listed in the Bible. The shortest cubit is about 18 inches long, so I am using this length to translate the measurements into feet and inches, but it could have been longer. Based on an 18 inch cubit, the tabernacle was roughly 30 ft. long and 12 ft. wide. It was divided into two rooms separated by a veil of fine twined linen. It opened on the east side. It then had a court around it approximately 150 ft. long and 75 ft. wide.

The east room was to be the sanctuary and it would look out on the altar of burnt offerings and the laver. The other room contained the altar of incense we mentioned above, the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat, a table and a candlestick. This room was called the holy of holies and only the high priest could enter it. The east room and the court could be entered by anyone who was not deemed unclean.

Ex. 30:22-33 gives instructions for making a holy anointing oil with which Moses was to anoint the tabernacle and its furniture, and Aaron and his sons as priests. It was to be made and used by the priests throughout their generations. Also a perfume was to be made and set before the ark continually. (Ex. 30:34-38).

Aaron and his sons were given the responsibility of the actual sanctuary and the holy of holies and the functions of sacrifices, etc. The Levites, in general, had charge over the whole tabernacle, including the court, but were not to approach the altar or attempt any of the functions of Aaron and his sons. (Num. 18:1-7) It was the job of Aaron and his sons to make atonement for the sins of the people.

Atonement means “covering” or “to cover”, i.e. it was the high priest’s responsibility to present the people before God without sin that they might fulfill the conditional **“if ye will obey my voice, and keep my covenant”** portion of the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. They were to do this in several ways. They were to teach both in reading the law and by offering sacrifices. Of particular importance was the sacrifice for sin made once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. This was done as a “covering” for the whole nation. They were to set themselves apart as an example of Israel setting herself apart from sin and the world, or being holy. They were to minister to the people in their needs such as in sickness and their spiritual needs.

Sacrifices were probably the primary emphasis of their work. They were required to offer a daily burnt offering of a lamb each morning and each evening. (Ex. 29:38-42; Num. 28:2-8) Also an additional two lambs and a meat offering (flour or cakes made with flour) were to be offered on the Sabbath. (Num. 28:9-10) On the first day of each month two young bullocks, one ram and seven lambs with their meat offerings were to be offered as a burnt offering, in addition to the continual daily sacrifice. Also a goat kid was offered as a sin offering. (Num 28:11-15) But then the people made sacrifices themselves as well and it was the priest’s job to take care of these. There were four basic sacrifices, the burnt offering, the sin offering, the trespass offering and the peace offering. Each was to be handled differently and different occasions and situations demanded one or more of these sacrifices. If you are reading through these books of the law, all of the sacrifices can get a little confusing, but if you remember that there are only four basic sacrifices, it should relieve the confusion. So that we know just what was to take place with each type of sacrifice, let’s look at what was required for each type.

BURNT OFFERING:

This could be a bullock without blemish, a ram or a he goat without blemish, or it could be an offering of turtle doves or young pigeons. If it came from an individual, it had to be offered of one’s own voluntary will. If it is a bullock, ram or goat, the owner is to kill it and the priests are to take the blood and sprinkle it round about the altar. The owner is then to skin it and cut it in pieces. The priests were to lay the pieces in order on the altar. The legs and the inward parts were to be washed with water and then laid on the altar and all of it is to be burnt with fire unto the LORD. The birds were to have their head wrung off and the blood wrung out at the side of the altar, their feathers plucked off and then split, but not cut completely in two and then laid on the altar and burned. The priests were to keep a fire on the altar continually. They had to remove the ashes from the altar and then move them to a clean place outside the camp. (Lev. 1:2-17; and Lev. 6:8-13)

SIN OFFERING:

This offering depends on who is offering it. If a high priest sins through ignorance, his offering is to be a young bullock without blemish. He is to lay his hand on the bullock’s head and then kill the bullock before the LORD. The priest is to take the blood into the tabernacle, dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord before the veil and then he is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD. He is then to pour the rest of the blood out at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering. Next he is to take all the fat that covers the inwards, the two kidneys and the fat on them, and the caul over the liver and burn all this on the altar. All of the rest of the bullock is then to be taken outside the camp, to where the ashes are taken, and it is to be burnt on wood there. (Lev4:3-12)

If it is the whole congregation that has sinned through ignorance, the elders of the people are to bring a young bullock before the LORD and lay their hands on it. The procedure is the same as with the high priest. (Lev. 4:13-21; Num. 15:22-26)

If it is a ruler who has sinned through ignorance, the sacrifice is to be a male kid of the goats. He is to put his hand upon its head and it is to be killed before the LORD. Instead of putting the blood on the horns of the altar of incense, the priest is to put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and the rest of the blood is to be poured out at the foot of the altar. Again the fat, kidneys and the caul is to be burned on the altar and the priest is to keep the rest of the goat. (Lev. 4:22-26)

If it is a common person who has sinned through ignorance, he is to bring a female kid of the goats that is without blemish or a female lamb without blemish. The procedure is the same as with the ruler and the male kid. (Lev. 4:27-35; Num. 15:27-29)

Any sin offering in which the blood is put on the altar of incense is not to be eaten, but if it is put on the altar of burnt offering, it is to be eaten by all the males among the priests. (Lev. 6:24-30)

TRESPASS OFFERING:

This offering can be a female lamb or kid or two turtle doves or two pigeons or it could be 1/10 ephah of fine flour. If it is a lamb or kid, it is to be killed where the burnt offering is killed and the blood sprinkled round about the altar. The fat of the rump, the inward parts, the kidneys and the caul are all to be removed and burnt on the altar. The males among the priests shall eat the rest. The sin offering and the trespass offering are to be handled the same.

If it is the turtle dove or the pigeons, then the priest shall offer one for a sin offering, but shall not divide it and the other for a burnt offering as described in the burnt offering.

If it is the fine flour, nothing is to be put with it. The priest will burn a memorial from it and the rest will be his.

With each of these, the person making the offering shall be forgiven. (Lev. 5:5-13)

Peace offering:

This offering can be cattle, male or female, or sheep or goats, male or female. The one making the offering shall lay his hand upon its head and kill it before the tabernacle. The priest shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar. The fat on the rump, the fat on the inward parts, the kidneys and the fat on them and the caul above the liver are all to be removed and burned on the altar. (Lev. 3:1-5; 6-11; 12-16)

The peace offering has to be offered of one's own will and it must be eaten the same day or the next. Anything left the third day is to be burned. (Lev. 19:5-8) The same applied to offering a vow. (Lev. 7:16-18)

If it is offered for a thanksgiving, then an offering of unleavened cakes mingled with oil, unleavened wafers mingled with oil, or cakes mingled with oil made with fine flour and fried, plus an offering of leavened bread is to be offered with the sacrifice. One is to be offered as a heave offering and the balance shall go to the priest making the offering. (Lev. 7:11-15)

The person making the peace offering keeps the sacrifice except for the breast which is to be waved before the LORD and the right shoulder which goes to the priest making the offering. The breast goes to the high priest. (Ex. 29:27-28; Lev. 7:28-34)

There is also a law concerning the meat offering which is usually offered in conjunction with another offering. Meat here is a reference to a grain or flour offering rather than a flesh offering.

The meat offering is to be of fine flour (usually barley or wheat) and oil (olive) is to be poured on it and frankincense is to be put on it. The priest is to take a handful of the flour and oil and all of the frankincense and burn it. The remnant goes to Aaron and his sons. (Lev. 2:1-3)

The meat offering can be baked in an oven, however. If so it shall be unleavened cake of fine flour mingled with oil or unleavened wafers anointed with oil or it can be an offering baked in a pan or fried in a frying pan, but again of fine flour with oil poured on it or fried in oil. Again, a memorial of it is to be burned on the altar and the rest goes to Aaron and his sons. No leaven or honey is to be used in any offering of the LORD made by fire. (Lev. 2:4-11; Lev. 6:14-18). Numbers 15:1-16 details the meat offering that is to be offered with each sacrifice.

Every oblation of meat offering shall be seasoned with salt. (Lev. 2:13) No animal that was sacrificed was to be blemished or to be evil favored in any way. (Deut. 17:1)

These are the basic sacrifices. There is occasionally a variation but the basic rules apply always. Lev. 2:12 says that any oblation of firstfruits is not to be burnt. Lev.2:14-16 says that if a meat offering is made of the firstfruits, it is to be green ears of corn (grain) dried by fire, grain beaten out of full ears or heads. Oil and frankincense are to be put on it and the priest is to burn a memorial of it like a regular meat offering.

All meat offerings were to be divided up among the high priest and his sons. (Lev. 7:10) The priest offering the burnt offering was to get the skin and the priest offering a meat offering baked in a pan was to receive it. (Lev. 7:8-9)

Once a year, the high priest was to take a young bullock for himself, and a ram for a burnt offering and two kids of the goats for the congregation and a ram for a burnt offering. He was to put on proper clothing and offer the bullock for a sin offering for himself. Then he was to cast lots on the goats and offer the one chosen for a sin offering for the congregation. He then is to take the live goat and lay both hands on it and confess all the iniquities of the children of Israel over it thus putting them on the head of the goat. Then he is to send the scapegoat away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. (Lev. 16:1-28) We'll see a little later that this came to be done on the Day of Atonement.

If someone sinned, through ignorance, in the holy things of the LORD, he was to bring a ram for a trespass offering, plus pay a fine determined by the priest, plus make amends for the damage done and add 20% of the cost and give it to the priest. (Lev. 5:15-19)

If someone lied about property left in his care, or found something lost and lied about it, or swore falsely, or deceived his neighbor, he was to first restore the property in question and then add 20% to it and give it to the one damaged. Then he was to bring a ram for a trespass offering plus a fine to be determined by the priest and offer it as a trespass offering before God. (Lev. 6:2-7)

Num. 5:6-10 tells us that if there is no one to recompense for the loss, the recompense and the offering are to both go to the priest making the offering.

There are at least a couple of rules concerning the animals used for sacrifices. First, it was to be perfect with no blemishes. It could not be an animal from the stranger's land. It had to be your own from birth. (Lev. 22:18-20; Lev. 22:21-25) It had to be at least 8 days old. You could not kill a mother and her young on the same day. (Lev. 22:27-30)

Num. 19:2-10 tells us of another ritual, that had to do with cleansing that we need to discuss before going further. The people were to bring to Moses and Aaron a red heifer without spot and in which there were no blemish. They were to give it to Eleazar, Aaron's son, who was to take it outside

the camp and have her slain in his presence. He was to take of her blood on his finger and sprinkle it directly before the tabernacle seven times. Then he was to have her burned totally along with cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet. He and the man burning her were to wash their clothes and bathe their flesh and return to the camp. One who is clean is then to gather up the ashes and lay them up in a clean place outside the camp where it is to be kept for the congregation for a “water of separation.” We’re told it is a purification for sin. We’ll discuss further how it is to be used shortly.

Besides offering sacrifices, the priests had some other duties. One on these duties was, in effect, to be the public health officer. One of the most feared communicable diseases of that day was leprosy. Lev. 13 describes how a priest was to determine if a person had leprosy. He was to enforce quarantine all the while until the person was determined not to have it or was healed. Leprosy was also in garments and it was the priest’s job to determine if it was healed in the garment or whether the garment had to be burned. Once a leper was healed, he had to be cleansed. This was quite a process that the priest had to go through so that the person could rejoin the congregation. On the eighth day of the cleansing he was to offer a lamb as a trespass offering, another as a sin offering, and another for a burnt offering. If the former leper could not afford the three lambs, he could substitute two turtle doves or two pigeons for two of the lambs. Lev. 14:2-33 details the complete process. A house could also have the plague of leprosy and the priest again was the one responsible for checking it out. If the plague couldn’t be stopped, the house was to be destroyed and removed out of the city. However, if it stopped, the priest was to pronounce it clean and go through a cleansing ritual with it. Lev. 14:49-53 details this ritual.

Any man with a running sore was considered unclean. Cleanliness was very much a preventative measure in checking the spread of anything like this. Once healed, another seven days had to elapse before the man could be cleansed. Lev. 15:13-15 tells how this ceremonial cleansing took place.

A woman in her menstrual period was considered unclean and if she continued to have an issue beyond her normal period, once she was cleansed of her issue, she must wait another seven days and be ceremonially cleansed on the eighth day. (Lev. 15:28-30)

Uncleanness, whether ceremonially or literally, was quite serious. We have discussed already that a person could be “cut off from the congregation” because of uncleanness. A number of things could cause a person to be unclean such as touching a dead body or the bone of a man, or touching the grave. If this happened, then some of the ashes of the red heifer, which we discussed before, were to be put into a vessel with running water and one who was clean was to take hyssop and dip it in the water and sprinkle the one who was unclean on the third and on the seventh day and then the unclean was to wash himself and his clothes and be clean at even. Anyone not doing this was to be cut off from his people.

The ashes and water were also to be used to sprinkle on the tent and all that was in it where a person dies, in order to cleanse it. (Num. 19:11-12)

The high priest was not to touch even his father or mother when they died. (Lev. 21:10-11) His sons could not touch any dead body except their father, mother, brother, virgin sister, son or daughter. They were to make no baldness on their head or beard, nor cut their flesh in any way as a sign of mourning. (Lev. 21:1-6) Even if one touched an unclean person, or became unclean himself in the natural course of things, he could not eat of the holy things until he was clean. (Lev. 22:2-7)

The priests were also to preside over certain holy days and the ceremonies and sacrifices attendant to them. The Sabbath of course was the first. Sabbath means cessation. Lev. 23:2-3 tells us work was to be done six days, **“but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein.”** The fourteenth day of the first month, Abib (roughly April on our calendar) was to signal the beginning of a seven-day feast celebrating Passover (Lev. 23:4-8) and the offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest. It was also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Ex. 34:18) They could not eat of the new harvest until they offered a sheaf of the firstfruits to God. (Lev. 23:10-14) They were to offer a burnt offering on the fifteenth day of the month and each day for seven days in addition to the usual burnt offerings. (Num. 28:16-25) They were to eat only unleavened bread and no leaven was to be found in their home for the 7 days. (Deut. 16:1-8)

Seven weeks from the day after the Sabbath during the Passover, they were to observe another one-day Feast of Weeks, later to be known as Pentecost. (Ex. 34:22-26) The harvest here was wheat and 2 loaves of leavened wheat bread were to be offered as a wave offering. It was to be a holy convocation and they were to offer one bullock and two rams as a burnt offering in addition to the usual daily burnt offering, one kid of the goats as a sin offering and two lambs as a sacrifice of peace offering. (Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12)

Deut. 16:16-17; Ex. 23a:17 and Ex. 34:23 tell us there are 3 times in a year that all the males were to appear before God in the place He chooses. These were the Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, both of which we have just mentioned, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles started on the fifteenth day of the seventh month following the final harvesting of the year including the grape or wine harvest. It was an eight day affair and the people were to build booths out of tree branches to stay in during this time. Special burnt offerings plus a sin offering was to be made each day. It was to be a time of rejoicing. (Lev. 23:34-36; Lev. 23:39-43; Num. 29:12-38; Deut. 16:13-15)

These are the three main feasts that were to be kept annually. There are a couple more special days that were to be observed annually. The first day of the seventh month is sometimes called the Feast of Trumpets. It was to be a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. A burnt offering was to be offered. (Lev. 23:24-25; Num. 29:1-6) This apparently was a day set aside to remember the communication system the priests were to develop with silver trumpets. The priests were to use trumpets to signal assembly or alarms while they were in the wilderness. (Num. 10:1-10)

On the tenth day of the seventh month there was to be the Day of Atonement. This was to be a Sabbath and the people were to afflict (humble) themselves. A special burnt offering was offered and this was the day each year that the high priest made atonement, first for himself with a sin offering and then for the people in which two goats were chosen, one to be sacrificed as a burnt offering, and the other (the scapegoat) was released in the wilderness after the high priest confessed the sins of the people over it. The procedures for this day have particular fulfillment in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ many centuries later. (Lev. 23:27-32; Num 29:7-11)

The attendance of the men of Israel was mandatory at the first three feasts at the place that God chose. Naturally there was always someone who, for good reason, could not attend. For example, if a man touched a dead body less than seven days before the 14th day of Abid, he would be unclean on the 14th, so he could not take part. One might have been in a journey far off. They were then to keep the Passover starting with the 14th day of the second month. (Num. 9:1-14)

A few examples of how a priest worked daily include the example in Lev. 19:20-22. In this case if a man lieth carnally with his bondmaid that is betrothed to an husband, she is to be scourged and he is to bring a trespass offering to the priest to make atonement for him. They are not put to death because she is not free.

Another is the case of a man who becomes jealous of his wife thinking she has had an affair with another man. The husband is to bring her to the priest. The priest is then to put her through a particular ritual that will prove whether she is guilty or not. (Num. 5:12-31)

Another example is found in Num. 6:2-21. Here a man or woman wants to separate themselves to a vow, a vow of a Nazarite. If for any reason he or she be defiled, such as unavoidably touching a dead person, then he is to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering to the priest and then start over on the days of his vow. When his vow is completed he is to bring a burnt offering, a sin offering and a peace offering to the priest which the priest shall offer for him.

We have already seen that it was their job to keep the fire continually on the altar for burnt offerings. It was also the job of the high priest to keep the candlestick in the holy of holies burning continually. (Lev. 24:2-4) This should give us an idea of the amount of work there was for the high priest and his sons to do.

They were to keep themselves holy or set apart from everyone else as well. None of them could have a blemish such as blindness, lameness, deformity of anything of this nature. To be able to go within the veil or come near the altar, they had to be good specimen of men and be in good health. (Lev. 21:17-23) They could not marry a whore, a divorced woman or a widow, but were to marry a virgin of their own people. (Lev. 21:13-15) They couldn't eat anything that had died of itself. (Lev. 22:8) They were not to defile themselves with any uncleanness, but were to keep God's ordinances. (Lev. 22:9)

Only the priests could eat of the holy things. Those born in his house can a purchased servant could eat of it, but a hired servant or a visitor could not. Even a daughter who was married outside the priesthood could not eat of it so long as she was married and if she had children. If she had no children and became widowed or divorced and returned to her father's house she could eat of it. (Lev. 22:10-13)

If someone who was not allowed to eat of the holy things did so unwittingly, he was to restore it plus 20% to the priest. (Lev. 22:14-16)

The priests were compensated in several ways. Of course the tithe was to go to the Levites. The Levites were then to give a tithe of the tithe to the high priest and his family. (Num. 18:20-32) Ex. 34:19-20 tells us that all the first-born of man and animals was to go to God. The firstborn sons and the firstling of an ass were to be redeemed, and all of the unredeemed animals plus the redemption price went to the priests as God's representatives. Israel was to offer up heave offerings of the first-fruits of the land. The priests received all heave offerings or wave offerings. (Num. 18:8-19) An offering of shewbread was to be made each Sabbath. This was to go to the high priest and his sons. (Lev. 24:5-9) We have already seen occasionally a fine was to be levied as part of a judgment. The priests received these fines.

The Levites had the responsibility of up keep of the tabernacle. This had to come from the tithes for the most part. However, Ex. 30:11-16 tells us of a poll tax (apparently a one-time tax) that went to the service of the tabernacle. We also know the materials for the tabernacle were all donated originally and later in Scripture we see offerings for the tabernacle or temple being taken.

I hope this helps us understand the reason for the ordinances which translates into the reasons for good many of the things that Christ did in His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The fact that many of these laws are no longer practiced has led many to feel the whole law has been done away with. This is simply not the case. Keep in mind that it is the principle of the law that we need to learn and understand. Also keep in mind that Christ said He came to “fulfill” the law and the prophets. We’ll be discussing this at considerable length as we continue our study. JRL