

18 – Vayikra & Joshua 15-17 – Outline

The Month of Nissan

1. It's important that we spend some time on the month of Nissan and Rosh Chodesh Nissan because we're beginning a new cycle of growth. One question we can be asking is "Does Rosh Chodesh Nissan have a particularly strong connection to newness and beginnings, even more than other Roshei Chodashim?"
2. The month of Nissan is the subject of the first commandment given to the Jewish people: "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you." (Exodus 12:2)
3. Rosh Chodesh Nissan is effectively the spring equinox, and this is important.
 - a. at precisely 5:24 EST on Monday, the length of the day and the night were both 12 hours everywhere on the planet; now, several days later, the daylight is longer than the darkness by some minutes; we are gaining about 2m 45sec of daylight every day now
 - b. a time when we're moving out of God's hiddenness to a time of miracle and more obvious protection and leading
 - c. whereas the onset of darkness in the fall is the beginning of exile, Nissan is a time for coming out of exile
 - i. the darkness of exile is the furnace that helps to forge the bride; it's the context of maturity
 - ii. the brightness of coming out of exile is the context for a new stage of revelation and learning
 - iii. this is a time to jump to the next level
 1. "Pesach," the major mo'ed of the month, means "to jump"
4. "Nissan" is the month of miracles
 - a. review: redemption reorients us to the spiritual life, placing the spiritual over the physical, and so the previous reckoning of the calendar is no longer appropriate
 - i. 2 ways to reckon the day:
 1. from Genesis 1, there is the natural order, night and then day
 2. from the sacrificial system, there is the supernatural order, day and then night
5. It is the "mitochondrion" of faith in the year
 - a. the seder, particularly, is an electric moment, a time for inculcating faith
 - i. R'Trugman – some of the Jewish person's earliest memories are of seders
 - ii. we see God inculcating faith in Him during the exodus story, not only for the Jewish people but also for the Egyptians and all the people in that region of the world (Rahab and others hear of what God did in Egypt)
 - iii. seder suggestion: pause to acknowledge what God has done in our lives
6. Nissan is both about having arrived at a point of completion and straight away looking ahead to being re-created, created anew
 - a. having arrived
 - i. we can see this in the setting up of the Tabernacle on the 1st of Nissan

1. setting up the Mishkan and the beginning of the service there on Rosh Chodesh Nissan means that on that day creation reaches a kind of fulfillment of what it is made for in the first place (R'Trugman, [Class 21, Vayikra](#) 38:40) – this indwelling of God in the lower world, this service, this connection to God; and this is cause for celebration, the rejoicing of having reached a higher level of the purpose for creation
- b. looking ahead to being re-created
 - i. the Mishkan is also the beginning of a new journey with God
 - ii. Rosh Chodesh Nissan, this first day of spring, is connected to the day the whole universe was created
 1. R'Trugman supports Rabbeinu Tam's insight regarding when the world was created (2 stages of creation, creation in thought in Tishrei, creation in deed in Nissan) to the setting of tiny buds in the fall (creation in thought) and the appearance of the leaves in the spring (creation in deed), concluding that the Mishkan is set up on the day that the world was created in deed (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGh6cYcamEc&list=PLYztuC2svll7X5sbSV1gXW0UO8NftkIF&index=3> 35m)
 - a. He further points out that many portions in a row are connected to Rosh Chodesh Nissan because they are connected to the setting up of the Mishkan and the inauguration of the priesthood and God's instructions at that time
 2. a higher level is never a place to sit and relax. There are times to enjoy rest, but not for long. When we get more light, and that's what's happening now, we can't be content with the shape of our lives because that new light illuminates us more deeply, and we see that there are still places within us where we are enslaved to the darkness
 - a. when the Tabernacle is inaugurated, God's Shechinah comes, and that is light; the arrival of that light requires a new journey to begin from that moment onward, and that includes the report of the 10 spies
 - b. in the same way that He fills the Tabernacle at this time, God fills our own bodies with His presence in a new way at this time after a cycle of life, a cycle of healing, a cycle of the year
 - i. might not feel it tangibly, but we trust that this is happening at this time of year
 - iii. on a very practical level, this month being connected to the energy of creation means that the faculty of speech is important and even empowered at this time
 1. creation happened through God's speech

2. therefore, this month is understood to be a good time to bring correction to our speech
 - a. this starts with speaking out what God has done for us and our ancestors, which is something we do at Passover but which we can be especially mindful of the whole month
 - b. a bit ironically, it can also mean practicing being silent
7. Lastly here, I mentioned that we have now come through a whole cycle of growth, what I call the “salvation pattern;” it seems appropriate here, as we begin again, to just name some of the key phrases for that pattern again:
 - 1) separation from the kingdom of darkness
 - 2) education in the light
 - 3) stumbling and repentance
 - 4) elevating Yeshua as King
 - 5) Yeshua providing a covering for us
 - 6) an inner cleansing
 - 7) physical fruit that reflects the spiritual growth

The Book of Vayikra

1. It is central – the third of five books of the Torah
2. Kehot Chumash: although Leviticus doesn’t have a lot of dramatic “action” in the book, it is actually here that the REAL action takes place: “the inner life of the individual soul and the soul of the community in their communion with God” (Kehot Chumash Vayikra, pg. 4)
3. at the heart of the book is God calling out to us; He first steps near (filling the Tabernacle), then asks us to step near to Him

Parsha Vayikra Summary

1. “korban” (Strong’s H7133) from “karav,” to draw near,” used in vs. 2
 - a. “bring” “sacrifice” and “innards” are all from this root, karav, which appears at least 18 times in just chapter 1
 - b. the purpose of the korbanot is to “drawn near,” both God to man and man to God
2. Overview of the types of korbanot (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4440323/jewish/Korbanot-The-Biblical-Temple-Sacrifices.htm ; <https://torah.org/torah-portion/mikra-5772-tzav/>):
 - a. both men and women could bring any of the categories of korbanot; Gentiles were generally only permitted to bring whole burnt offerings (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1017015/jewish/Maaseh-Hakorbanot-Chapter-3.htm)
 - b. 2 Broad Categories:
 - i. animal sacrifices (“zevachim” – “slaughtered”)
 - ii. grain offerings (“menachot”)
 1. wheat or barley flour with olive oil and frankincense
 - c. Animal Sacrifices:
 - i. Accepted animals for sacrifices
 1. oxen, sheep, goats, doves, pigeons

- ii. 4 Types of Animal Sacrifices
 - 1. whole burnt offering (olah)
 - a. everything burnt except the skin
 - 2. peace offering (shelamim)
 - a. part burnt on the altar, part to the priest, and part to the one who brings the sacrifice
 - b. thanksgiving offerings are a sub-type of the peace offerings
 - 3. sin offering (chatat)
 - a. partly burnt and part to the priest
 - 4. guilt offering (asham)
 - a. partly burnt and part to the priest
- 3. note that the first sacrifices mentioned are not for sin but simply to draw near
 - a. the first mentioned: whole burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering
 - b. the last 2, however, are important; they acknowledge that one reason we seek to draw near is that we have become separated by sin and guilt
- 4. we can see that there is a lot of complexity here in this sacrificial system; this complexity is reflecting:
 - i. Yeshua's sacrifice
 - ii. the many ways a distance can open up between us and God, requiring different paths of repentance
 - iii. the complexity of the human soul

The Small Alef

- 1. He is calling to us through the sacrificial system, the subject of "Vayikra"
 - a. the small aleph of "Vayikra"
 - i. the commentaries seem to all talk about the humility of Moses, here, so there must be an element of that, but I don't think it's quite hitting the bullseye
 - 1. the aleph is especially symbolic of God; "aluph" means "master" or "lord;" this letter is called "the image of God" and many of the names of God begin with an aleph
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGh6cYcamEc&list=PLYztuC2svll7X5sbsv1gXW0UO8NftfkIF&index=3> 15:30m)
 - a. El, Elohim, Eloha, Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, Adonai, Adon Olam, Adir
 - ii. God calls out to mankind ("vayikra") by becoming small in the form of Yeshua (small alef), Who was sacrificed on our behalf in order to draw us close to God (the korbanot – the subject of parsha Vayikra)
 - 1. Yeshua is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth - first
 - 2. God calls to us first: verses: Isaiah 65:1, 1 John 4:19, Rom 5:6-8, Philippians 3:12, John 15:16, 2 Tim 1:8-9, 1 Corinthians 1:28-29, 1 Peter 1:14-15

A General Framework for Understanding the Sacrificial System

1. How do we draw near through the korbanot? A suggested broad frame for how to understand the idea of sacrifice:
 - a. It is like baptism at conversion, the physical capstone on a movement of the spirit. The real weight of the moment is found in the decision, but God gives us a physical pathway to express our minds and hearts through, too, baptism
 - i. the weight is in the spiritual decision, but the physical reflection is important, too
 - ii. He knows us because He designed us; He knows what we need to make solid and fixed and certain a movement of the spirit
 - b. In the same way, when we have decided to draw near to God for whatever reason, this is a spiritual matter first, and the korban is the physical reflection that helps to cement the internal movement
 - i. if we need to repent, we do that as King David did, on our knees, and trust in that moment for forgiveness through Yeshua
 - ii. then we bring a korban, and we go away with the solid sense that we have been forgiven through the sacrifice of Yeshua and our relationship with God is restored
 - iii. the physical experience is raw and powerful – sight of the violence of death, the flow of the blood, the sound of the knife, the smell of the fire – all of this does a deep work
 - c. In a marriage, the two must give themselves completely, spirit, soul, and body; the korbanot are the very foundation of how God gives everything to humanity, through Yeshua, and are likewise foundational to how we also give ourselves to Him entirely.

Why Are We Reading About Sacrifices Now?

1. We've come to a place of newness in the year, and newness requires an emptying so that we can be refilled with new life, a dying so that we can be raised again. What better to prepare us for leaving Egypt again than a study of the sacrificial system, which is all about the dying that leads to new life.
 - a. matzah (unleavened bread), is a central focus of Nissan and is another picture of this need to empty out the old life
 - b. though the sacrificial system is really showing us complete surrender of our whole being, the imagery of it is very connected to animals
 - i. Egypt was a place of animal worship, and much of the battle in this life is found in surrendering especially that animal side to be used for higher purposes, to be elevated
 1. the sages speak of the omer period as a time of working on the nephesh, the lower part of the soul, sometimes called the "animal soul"

Yeshua

1. one last thought in relation to Yeshua: there are some who say that since Yeshua is the substance of the sacrificial system, which is just a shadow of His sacrifice, why would we even bother with it at all? Why should it ever be reinstated?
 - a. it will be reinstated: Jeremiah 33
 - b. shadows are important
 - i. they are what God gives us to work with; who are we to think that one of these shadows is no longer necessary, particularly a shadow that is at the very center of God's Word? The earthly High Priest reflects the heavenly High Priest. Do we do away with him? The shadows don't only teach us by making tangible the spiritual reality. They also establish a balance in reality that is God's design. God has designed it that the spiritual reality be reflected in the physical realm. Who are we to say, "We can do away with this reflection!" That's just arrogance.

Joshua 15-17

1. Summary
2. The complexity of the soul pictured in both the korbanot and the division of the Land
 - a. In the same way that we are seeing the complexity of the soul addressed through the complexity of the sacrificial system, in this section of Joshua, we are seeing the soul of Israel, which is the people, separated into regions defined by city names and other features. It's complex.
3. Caleb is an encouragement to us
 - a. he is an example that we can never stop growing as long as we are alive; we must always be taking down giants until the very last day
4. Joseph's fear of the Canaanites in the valleys:
 - a. they still doubted?
 - b. the individual tribes had trouble clearing their territories because it was easier to fight all together under a strong leader, Joshua, but it's harder to fight as a single tribe under lesser leaders
 - i. this lesser sense of security is God's way to help us to grow, to exercise more faith
 - ii. Amalek steps up to whisper in the darkness, "Is God with you or not?"
 1. we crush Amalek, and we pick up the sword

18 – Vayikra & Joshua 15-17 – Script (not exact)

Welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called Spiritual Seasons. In these teachings, we dive into the weekly Torah portions by making connections to the pattern of salvation we see in the yearly calendar. This week we are in portion Vayikra, the first 5 chapters of Leviticus. As we do with each portion, we'll fit Vayikra into a pattern of yearly growth, and that pattern is salvation.

The Month of Nissan

Let's start by talking about the new month we have just entered Wednesday night. It's important that we spend time on the month of Nissan and Rosh Chodesh Nissan because, with Nissan, we're beginning a new year of growth. The cycle is both coming to a close and beginning again. One question we can be asking is, "Does Rosh Chodesh Nissan have a particularly strong connection to newness and beginnings, even more than other new moons?" It turns out that although we don't mark the beginning of Nissan with a special holiday other than Rosh Chodesh, it truly is an especially important Rosh Chodesh.

Let's start by pointing out that the month of Nissan is the subject of the first commandment given to the Jewish people as a whole while they are still in Egypt. That commandment is found in Exodus 12 and says, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you" (Exodus 12:2). So, Nissan is singled out here with this honor of being the first commandment to the nation.

Beyond this, let's notice that Rosh Chodesh Nissan occurs at a very special moment in the year, the spring equinox. This happened this year on Monday at exactly 5:24 EST. At that moment, the direct rays of the sun were exactly on the equator, and day and night were balanced at 12 hours each everywhere on the planet. Now that we are several days later, the daylight is longer than the darkness by some minutes; we are gaining about 2m 45sec of daylight a day. Day is now dominating night.

What does it mean that Rosh Chodesh Nissan coincides with this tipping point, at least in the northern hemisphere where most people live and where Israel is? Remember that the darkness indicates that God is hiding a bit and the physical is being emphasized. The darkness is the time for the moon to dominate. It's the time for the bride to reflect back the light of the sun. The dark side of the year is associated with GOING INTO EXILE and the testing that refines the bride and gives her a chance to shine out in the darkness. Nissan, on the other hand, is a month dominated by the story of COMING OUT OF EXILE, the Passover story, which we tell right at the center of Nissan, on the full moon of the month. We are now moving into a time of miracle, when God is less hidden and His protection and leading are more obvious. The brightness of this summer side of the year is the context for a new stage of REVELATION and LEARNING.

Nissan is a time to jump to the next level. This is something God does for us. We see this idea in the Hebrew word for "Passover," "Pesach," which is similar to the way the English sounds. The root "pasach" means to "hop" or "jump" or "skip over" or "to spare" something. God jumps

over the houses of Israel in Egypt with the last plague, and in the process, Israel is given the opportunity to jump to a higher level of relationship with Him.

Let's go back to the idea that the first commandment given to the people as a whole is that the month of Passover is to be regarded as the beginning months. Why should this be such an important commandment? Truly, the implication of this commandment is profound. For one thing, the entire lunar-solar calendar grows out of this commandment, the fact that the Jewish lunar calendar must be adjusted periodically for the solar calendar to keep Passover happening in the spring. But there's something much more profound happening here. We've mentioned it before, but it bears repeating here.

Most cultures in the ancient Middle East celebrated the 7th month as the beginning of the year. Why did they do that? I'm not sure, but it might have to do with the pattern of night and day we see right from the beginning in Genesis 1. The 7th month is when the darkness begins to dominate the day. And God's established pattern in Genesis 1 is that the darkness comes before the day. That's why a Jewish day begins in the evening. God said, "And there was evening and there was morning, one day," yom echad. The darkness of evening is first. By saying this, God is ESTABLISHING A NATURAL ORDER wherein the darkness leads the two halves that make the echad, the wholeness of a day. Let me repeat that, in Genesis 1, God creates a NATURAL ORDER wherein darkness comes first.

If that is the natural order, is the "spiritual order" the reverse? Do we have a precedent for that? In fact we do see the reverse order in Scripture at a very important place. When God gives the commandment regarding the daily offering of two lambs, this is what the text says: "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight" (Exodus 29:38-39). The tamid offering is given according to the opposite reckoning of a day, first morning then evening. In other words, the Temple works on a different reckoning of a day. The two daily offerings that are the heartbeat of the Tabernacle and the Temple are to happen in an opposite order to the natural order established at the beginning. The construction of the Tabernacle and the beginning of the service there represents a reversal of the natural order. The service of the Tabernacle is what redeemed people do, not people who are enslaved to the natural order in Egypt.

It's really quite breathtaking what God is doing here. He is taking the calendar established according to the natural order and He is saying, "This reckoning of the calendar is no longer suitable for a redeemed people. Now your year is to go from day to day rather than from night to night. At the very least, we can say that God is telling Israel to add this reckoning of months to their reckoning of the year so that they function by both, and that is what we have seen happen with the two beginnings in the year, Rosh Hashanah and Rosh Chodesh Nissan. But I think God's emphasis here is that Israel is to be a people who live in the SPIRITUAL first and the physical reflection second. We are a people who now transcend the physical because we are a redeemed people. What looks like a rather innocuous, not-so-important commandment about which month is first is really indicating that a massive flipping of worldview has happened.

And we see this idea reflected in the meaning of the word “nissan.” “Nes” means “miracle.” Nissan is known at the month of miracles, and we can see all the miracles in the Passover story, not to mention the miracles of renewal in nature in the spring. Miracle transcends the natural order. For redeemed people, the light of miracle comes first rather than the darkness of the natural. We don’t live for the natural. We don’t wake up and go to bed with the thought of how we can accumulate more stuff. We begin and end our day with the thought of how we can better serve, and the stuff is secondary and is beneficial only if it is in service to the spiritual goals; otherwise, it’s an enslaving trap.

Connected to the miracles of this season is the idea that Nissan is a time for God to give us the gift of FAITH in Him. Nissan is called the “mitochondria of faith” in the year. It’s the wellspring of faith in the months. And the main way we receive this faith in our day is through the telling of what God has done for us. This is the heart of the Passover seder, the telling of what God has done for our spiritual ancestors. It is a time to pass along faith in God to both the children and the adults. R’Trugman describes the night of the seder as having a kind of electricity in the air. He says that for many Jewish people, many of their earliest memories are of seders.

Let me take a minute here to offer a practical suggestion for your seder this year. At some point, pause in your recitation of the haggadah and allow people to share how God has been working in their life or how God did something special in the past or how He did something for a parent or grandparent. It’s good to personalize the seder in that way. We are all to understand that we are personally coming out of Egypt on that night, so it’s good to personalize the redemption story.

The last point I’d like to make here on the month of Nissan is that on Rosh Chodesh Nissan in particular, we are mindful that we have arrived at a POINT OF COMPLETION ON THE ONE HAND, and we are already looking ahead to being RE-CREATED ON THE OTHER HAND, a whole new turn of the wheel.

The setting up of the Tabernacle on Rosh Chodesh Nissan speaks to both of these ideas of arrival at a goal and beginning a new journey. The setting up of the Tabernacle is the culmination of a year’s worth of salvation, a year of walking with God out of Egypt and into the wilderness. R’Trugman says that the setting up of the Mishkan and the beginning of the service there on Rosh Chodesh Nissan means that on that day creation reaches a kind of fulfillment of what it is made for in the first place. The lower realm is to be a dwelling place for God, a place of intimate interaction between Him and mankind, and the rest of His creation, as well.

But setting up the Tabernacle is also a beginning of a new journey with God. Looking beyond the Tabernacle, Rosh Chodesh Nissan is connected by Jewish tradition to the day of the creation of the world. There is a tradition that the universe was created on the 1st of Nissan. So there is a sense that this is a day that marks the beginning of not only creation but also re-creation, being created again. There is actually a long debate in the Talmud in Tractate Rosh Hashanah about when the world was created, in the 7th month of Tishrei or the 1st month of Nissan. After

putting forward much evidence for both opinions, in the end, the Sages cannot come to a conclusion. Eventually, though, along comes Rabbeinu Tam who famously brings the two views together by saying that God created the world in THOUGHT in Tishrei and in DEED, in actuality, in Nissan. And R'Trugman points out in support of Rabbeinu Tam that in the fall, the trees have just set their buds, but they are tiny. They are the potential for new life, new leaves. It is not until the spring that those leaves actually emerge and become visible.

The point here is that even as Rosh Chodesh Nissan is a kind of conclusion of a journey, it is also a day of re-creation. The spring shows us clearly that this energy of rebirth is the energy that is flowing through the creation at this time, and this new life of spring is absolutely beautiful here in Ohio, where our seasons are very pronounced and our winter tends to drag out a bit. The trees are just getting ready to leaf out right now. The air in the forests here is pregnant with new life, one might say.

A point I want to make here is that a higher level is never a place to sit and relax. Having arrived at a goal never means that we stop for good. When we get more light, and that's what's happening now – a new light is beginning to shine— we can't be content with the shape of our lives because that new light illuminates us more deeply, and we see that there are still places within us where we are enslaved to the darkness. It's a bit of a catch 22: the goal is the indwelling of God, but by that new light of His greater indwelling, we see that there is more work to be done. And we praise Him for the revelation and trust that He Who illuminated the darkness will help us to walk with Him in faith into a greater freedom. When the Tabernacle is inaugurated, God's Shechinah comes, and that is a new light for Israel, but it is also the beginning of a new journey where they approach the Land of Promise and the 10 spies bring back the evil report. That is God illuminating the darkness that remains in the nation. In the same way that God fills the Tabernacle at this time, God fills our own bodies with His presence in a new way at this time of the year, and by that light, we see that there is more work to be done.

On a very practical level, this month being connected to the energy of creation means that the faculty of speech is important and even empowered at this time. God created the world through His speech. He spoke and it was. Therefore, this month is understood to be a good time to bring correction to our speech. This starts with speaking out what God has done for us and our ancestors, as we mentioned a minute ago. We should not only be doing that at Passover, but we should be making a special point to speak of what God has done for us this whole month. This is a good use of our faculty of speech. Another suggestion for working on our speech this month is perhaps a bit ironic: this is a good month to practice being silent, holding our tongue. This is a vast challenge for most of us. Take heart that God has designed the month of Nissan with a little extra help for learning how to control the tongue. So if you can be purposeful in growing in this kind of discipline this month, you may find that you are able to make more progress now with this than at another time of the year.

The Book of Vayikra

Let's turn now to the Torah portion. We're starting a new book, which we call in English "Leviticus." In Hebrew, the name of the book is the same as this first portion in the book, "Vayikra," which is the first word of the book. It means "And He called," speaking of God calling to Moses.

For most people, the book of Leviticus is a slog. The English word Leviticus means "of the Levites," which is somewhat appropriate because the book contains so many laws directly related to the priesthood. Although Vayikra can seem thick with laws that on the surface seem like they have little to do with us today, we need to resist the temptation to ignore it. Many sources point out that Vayikra is the third of five books of the Torah, meaning that it is the middle book, and the middle is the central stem that the others branch out of. The Kehot Chumash says that although Vayikra doesn't have a lot of dramatic "action" in the book, it is actually here that the REAL action takes place: "the inner life of the individual soul and the soul of the community in their communion with God."

The Hebrew name "Vayikra" means that the heart of this book is God calling out to us. It might be composed of a great many laws, but at the heart of each of those laws is God calling out to us. When you call out to someone, you're asking them to draw near to you. And God can ask us to draw near to Him because He first draws near to us. At the end of Exodus, God comes down from on high and fills a humble tent made with human hands. That's God coming near to us. And from that tent, He calls out to us, "vayikra."

Parsha Vayikra Summary

Let's turn now to the portion, itself. Portion Vayikra is a great example of how God is calling out to us through the commandments of the Torah, how He first draws near to us before He asks us to draw near to Him. And it's also an example of how the book of Leviticus appears impenetrable on the surface, but just below the surface is the heart of God.

Vayikra is a description of the sacrificial system. By way of summarizing the portion, we'll briefly go over some details of the sacrifices, including the various types of sacrifices. First of all, though, let me explain the Hebrew word that is used to describe the sacrifices in general. I often prefer using the Hebrew with this topic, though I tend to switch back and forth. The word used in the second verse here for "offering" is "korban." In fact, the root of this word is used something like 18 times in this chapter because it's the same root for another important word here, the word for "to bring," which is "karav." "To bring a sacrifice" is "yakriv korban," the same root used twice. And not only that, but the word for "innards," as in what's inside the animal, is also from this root, the word "kerev."

Well, what does this root, "karav," mean? It means "to draw near." And that's very important to always keep in mind when we're reading about and thinking about the sacrificial system, the korbanot. It's about God drawing near to man and man drawing near to God. So we can translate the idea of "bringing a sacrifice" as "drawing near to offer a draw-near." It's about closeness to God. So I will sometimes say "korban" or "korbanot" for "sacrifice" or "offering."

Just by way of setting the stage, understand that both Jewish men and women could bring any of the categories of korbanot. Gentiles were also allowed to bring a korban, but they could generally only bring whole burnt offerings.

Let's summarize the categories now, and these are all listed in the outline that is posted below the video, along with transliterations of the Hebrew names. The two main types are the animal sacrifices and the grain offerings. The grain offerings are composed of wheat or barley flour mixed with olive oil and frankincense.

The animal sacrifices are generally divided into 4 groups. Only five types of animals could be sacrificed: oxen, sheep, goats, doves, and pigeons. The four categories are the whole burnt offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering. The whole burnt offering was entirely burned up except for the skin. The sin and guilt offerings were both partly burned on the altar and partly given to the priest. The peace offering was divided three ways: part to the altar, part to the priest, and part to the one who brings the offering.

One thing to note here is that the first korbanot mentioned are not for sin or guilt. These are only mentioned in the second half of the portion. So the separations of sin and guilt are not necessarily the primary reasons we are attempting to draw near to God through the korbanot. Maybe we just want to express thanks to God for something. Maybe we want to show gratitude for His provision or say thank you for rescue from a difficult situation. And yet it could also be that sin has separated us from God, and so He also provides pathways to help deal with this issue, as well.

A second point here is that we see a lot of complexity in the system of korbanot. And this complexity reflects several aspects of what the korbanot are doing. They are complex because on one important level they picture Yeshua's sacrifice, and that sacrifice is complex. On another level, they are addressing the human soul, and the human soul is complex, and our motives for drawing near are complex. We can add in, too, that the ways we can become distant from God are also complex.

The Small Alef

I will share some more thoughts about the korbanot in general, but first I want to draw our attention to an oddity in a hand-written Torah scroll because I think it has a lot of meaning especially for Believers in Yeshua. There is a small letter aleph in the word "vayikra." And much is said about this unusually small letter. The point that the rabbis usually make here is that the small aleph refers to the humility of Moses, that Moses saw himself as little before God and man in the proper way.

But as useful and good as that teaching is, I think the rabbis are missing something important here. The aleph is first and foremost the letter that represents God. Here, the rabbis are applying the letter to Moses, and that's not inappropriate since Adam's name begins with an aleph. But when the rabbis explain the Jewish letters, they heavily emphasize that the aleph is first symbolic of God. The letter is even described as "the image of God." The word "aluph"

means “lord” and “master,” and the aleph is known as the “lord and master” of the aleph-bet. Many of God’s names begin with the aleph.

So if the aleph represents God, why is there a small aleph here in the word “vayikra,” “and He called.” How do we connect together God calling to us, God making Himself small, and the korbanot, which is the subject of this Torah portion? Clearly it is this: God calls out to mankind by becoming small in the form of Yeshua Who was sacrificed on our behalf in order to draw us close to God. Let me say that again: God calls out to mankind, vayikra, by becoming small in the form of Yeshua, the letter aleph, Who was sacrificed on our behalf in order to draw us close to God, the korbanot.

It’s an amazing bit of ancient wisdom to make this letter aleph small in this first word of the book of Vayikra. It says once again that God reaches out to us FIRST. God makes Himself small FIRST before expecting us to make ourselves small as we reach for Him. And we can say that God does this first because we know that Yeshua is the Lamb slain FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH. Romans 5 says: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Messiah died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

So, the small aleph of “vayikra” speaks to us of Yeshua’s sacrifice, which comes first. Therefore, we are called to also make our lives a living sacrifice.

A General Framework for Understanding the Sacrificial System

I’d like to suggest a general idea now for how we should approach the whole idea of the korbanot. How do we draw near to God through the korbanot, through an animal sacrifice? The idea is that we should think about bringing a korban in the same way that we think about baptism at conversion; it’s THE PHYSICAL CAPSTONE on a movement of the spirit, an internal movement. The real weight of the moment is found in the decision, but God gives us A PHYSICAL PATHWAY THROUGH WHICH WE ARE ABLE TO EXPRESS OUR MINDS AND HEARTS, because this marking of the moment in the physical is important for us. He knows us, because He designed us. He knows what we need to make solid and fixed and certain a movement of the spirit. We know that, when we decide to follow the Lord, that’s chiefly an internal matter, a matter of the heart, a decision, an activation of the will. We might immediately express that decision through a prayer in which we tell God that we are turning away from the ways of the world and submitting to Him as King. But what quickly follows that prayer is the physical reflection, the baptism that pictures what has just happened inside of us, the physical picture of dying to the old life and being raised to the new.

In the same way, when we have decided to draw near to God for whatever reason, this is a spiritual matter. We are filled with thanksgiving, or we want to acknowledge God’s provision through firstfruits, or maybe we have sinned and are filled with repentance – these are firstly matters of the inner person, the spirit. THAT IS WHERE THE REAL WEIGHT IS. But the inside must always have a physical outside to reflect it. And God gives us specific physical pathways

for expressing what is going on inside of us in the form of the various korbanot. If what is going on inside is repentance, first we get on our knees like King David did, and we repent before the Lord, and we trust Him for forgiveness in that moment, knowing that that forgiveness rests upon Yeshua's sacrifice. And so this is all largely inward. But then, in His graciousness, God has also given us the physical pathway by which we begin to make manifest our repentance and His forgiveness, and that is a sin sacrifice. And we bring that korban, and we go away with the solid sense that we have been forgiven through the sacrifice of Yeshua and our relationship with God is restored.

Where did the weight of that restoration lie? It was not in the physical pathway but the spiritual. The substance of the re-connection happens on the knees and is founded upon the work of Yeshua. But does the physical pathway also help us move forward? Most certainly it does. As Grant often says, we are hybrid creatures, amphibians, half spiritual and half physical.

The physical reflection speaks powerfully to us not only of Yeshua's sacrifice for us but also of how WE GIVE OURSELVES COMPLETELY to God, in the same way that Yeshua surrendered His body. It is a moment in which a person's senses would be filled full with the weight of sin, the greatness of Yeshua, the need to surrender the flesh – so much. But it's nearly wordless. It's a quiet ritual. It's a time for the body to absorb the sight of the violence of death and the flow of the blood, and the sound of the knife, and the smell of the fire. And all of that does its work to cement the matters of the heart and mind.

In a marriage the two must give of themselves completely. This is more than just a mental exercise. It's spirit, soul, and body. The korbanot are the very foundation of how God gives everything to humanity, including the body, and they are likewise foundational to how we also give ourselves to Him.

Why are We Reading About Sacrifices Now?

As a final topic here directly related to the korbanot, let's make a connection to the calendar. Why are we reading about korbanot at this time in the year as we start a new cycle of months? Part of the answer here has to be that the foundation of all salvation is the death of Yeshua. The whole cycle of re-creation to come rests on the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world and His blood shed for us.

And one of the main lessons we draw from His death is that we must also follow Him in death, and this is what we are about to be called to do in Nissan. If we are to receive new life, we must put to death the old life. This is beautifully pictured not only in the korbanot, but also in the image of the matzah, the unleavened bread, which is so central to this month. Matzah is another picture of this need to empty out the old life. We must submit to death. This is what happens at the beginning of a new cycle of growth. And this death is especially connected to the animal soul, the nephesh, which the Sages say is what we are particularly working on during the Counting of the Omer, which begins in Nissan. And here now in Vayikra we are seeing pictures of animals being put to death, the same animals that were worshiped in Egypt.

Yeshua

Let's move forward now and make one more point connected to Yeshua. There are some who say that since Yeshua is the substance of the sacrificial system, why would we even bother with reestablishing it? The korbanot strike us as barbaric, though that couldn't be further from the truth. If the system of korbanot are the shadow of His sacrifice, why do we need these now?

Part of what I said earlier speaks to that question, the idea that God gives us the korbanot as a physical pathway for us to begin manifesting physically the desire of our heart to draw near to God. But there's a bit more to say here.

First, let's note that the Bible is clear that the korbanot Will be reestablished. Grant and Robin in their talk this week point to Jeremiah 33 on this topic of the restoration of the sacrificial system. It says there that not only will the korbanot continue, but if we can break God's covenant with day and night so that they don't come when they are supposed to, then God will break His covenant with the Levitical priesthood. In other words, it's not going to happen.

You see, though the korbanot are but shadows of the real thing, which is Yeshua, WE LIVE IN A SHADOWLANDS, and we need the shadows. Who are we to say that any shadow that God gives us is obsolete, especially shadows as important as these that sit at the very center of His Torah? How foolish to think that we can decide that gifts of God meant for relationship with Him are no longer valid or necessary! The earthly shadows reflect the heavenly reality, and that is true for every shadow down here. The earthly High Priest reflects the heavenly High Priest. Do we decide to do away with him for that reason? The shadows don't only teach us and affect us by making tangible the spiritual reality. They also establish a balance in creation that is God's design. God has designed it that the spiritual reality be reflected in the physical realm. Who are we to say, "We can do away with this reflection!" That's just arrogance. If God designed it to reflect, let it reflect! And may the Temple be rebuilt soon and in our days.

Joshua 15-17

Well, lastly now, let's turn our attentions to Joshua chapters 15-17. In chapter 15, we see the allotment for Judah spelled out, along with Caleb's special inheritance within Judah. After getting Joshua's blessing in the last chapter, Caleb drives out the giants living in Chevron, and he also captures a place called "Debir." Chapters 16 and 17 deal with the allotment to the sons of Joseph. At the end of chapter 17, the sons of Joseph complain that the hill country is too small for them, and Joshua tells them to clear the Canaanites out of the valleys in their territories and settle them. They respond that they have iron chariots and are too strong. Joshua answers back that they will, indeed, drive out the Canaanites, despite their iron chariots.

I'd like to make just a few quick points here. The first is that in the same way that the sacrificial system is complex partly because it reflects the complexity of the human soul, in this section of Joshua, we are seeing a complexity within the Land that reflects the soul of the nation. If the Land is the body for the soul, the soul is the people, the people of Israel. And the soul is complex. Here it is represented as having 12 main sections, the 12 tribes, or 13, depending on how you're counting. And the complexities of that soul are reflected in the body as all of these

place names, these boundaries. Grant has often taught us that the human body is complex because our souls are complex. And here in these chapters of Joshua, as in the system of korbanot, we're getting a window into that complexity.

Thank goodness we don't have to know everything about how our bodies work to be able to use them. We'd all be a lost cause if we had to understand ourselves like that. And yet, God has also enabled us to open the book and start learning about the body. And each day science learns more and more. We have discovered wonders in these bodies. And we will never get to the bottom of it.

The second point I'd like to make here is that Caleb is a mensch, and we need to be encouraged by his example. The more we see of him, the more we come to respect him as upright, whole-hearted, and brave. At this point in the story, he is old. Why should he get up the nerve to fight the giants in Chevron? And here's the real connection to today's teaching in Vayikra: we must never give in to the idea that we have come far enough. If we are still breathing, we must still be taking down the giants in our lives. It's just part of living. And we can't let the evil one tell us that we are too old to grow or that we don't have the energy left to change. If God has left us in the game for another spin of the wheel, then He will give us what we need to continue climbing with Him. And if I die during this next season or the one after, God forbid, but I'm going to die climbing. Let me die with my tools in hand.

And lastly, a point about the house of Joseph's fear of the Canaanites in the valleys. How much had they seen of God's faithfulness in battle already? Yet they still doubted? I think the individual tribes struggled to clear their territories because it's one thing to fight with a large group in which everyone is absolutely submitted to a strong leader, and it's another thing to grow up and fight on your own when that strong leader retires and passes the torch. God is always calling us to step up to a life of higher faith. It's not a journey for the faint of heart. Joshua had many gifts, and people listened to him because God's anointing on him and preparation of him was clear. Joshua was near to Moses, and Moses was near to God. But God's way is that as we grow, His hand is a bit less obvious, and His selected leaders are perhaps only shadows of the original leaders; this is by design. And so the people are called to trust God in what looks to be a less secure situation. You could imagine the warriors of Joseph's tribes saying, "I'm happy to go to battle under Joshua, because I know God is with him. But our own tribal leaders don't hold a candle to him!" And in that moment, the voice of Amalek comes back to haunt us, "Is God with us or not?" How can Joseph be doubting after seeing God work in such a mighty way? It's because Amalek is always lurking. And when Amalek begins to murmur in the darkness like that, WE DESTROY HIM, and we say, "God IS with us," and we take out the sword and charge forward at the enemies who seem so rooted in their valleys.

We'll leave it with that thought today. Thanks for listening. As I mentioned before, I have posted a link to an outline below the video. May God make us people who embrace the call to grow again with excitement and joy. May He help us to be people who can control our tongues. May we be a people who respond to His drawing near to us by drawing near to Him. And may He make us into the people He wants us to be. Shalom.

