Leviticus - Commentaries by Alfred Henry Burton

Christian's Library: Volume 10, Bible Study: The Offerings

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

IN a recent number of the Christian's Library in the Bible Study on Exodus 30., the question was raised whether the altar in Leviticus 16:18 was the golden altar or the brazen altar. In reference to this we have received the following notes from a correspondent whose judgment is of much weight:

1.The expression "before the Lord" is moral rather than topographical, and decides nothing in this case.

2. Leviticus 16:33 proves that the altar in question is the brazen altar, for it stands in contrast with the tabernacle as a whole (cf. Ezekiel 40:45, 46, &c.).

3. Exodus 30 refers to God's order before the failure of the priesthood, and is really prophetic, carrying us on to the last days in principle. There was no prohibition then to the high priest against entering into the most holy place.

4. In Leviticus 16 all depends upon the failure of the priesthood, as the opening verses show, when the order of Exodus 30 was set aside; and it shows God's provision for this failure, introducing Christ's present place in glory consequent upon this failure, and a full redemption made because of it. In the future day, the separation between the Most Holy Place and the Sanctuary will be maintained by folding doors! whether open or shut occasionally does not appear) —no vail. That being rent refers to the present time, and Christ's actual place in glory. See Ezekiel 41:23, 24, as compared with 1 Kings 6:31, 32, and 2 Chronicles 3:14 gives the vail which was to be rent.

Students can weigh these points for themselves. These pages are for study of the Scriptures, and the great thing is to see what Scripture actually says. Our need and desire is to learn from God out of His Word. It is an important thing to go on reading, over and over again, not troubling greatly if everything is not clear at once, and not making laborious mental efforts to get things clear. By reading the Scriptures and seeking to walk with God, all things necessary for us will become plain as we go on.

The Sin Offering. —This subject commences a fresh section of Leviticus, marked by the words, "And Jehovah spoke to Moses." The first three chapters are taken up with worship in its different aspects, as it is acceptable to God. This section from 4:1 to 6:7 takes up the question of sin and trespass, interrupting communion and preventing worship.

We need to bear in mind, as all through Leviticus, that the point of view is God's dwelling in the midst of His people. Exodus shows how this wonderful fact is made possible and actually carried out. Then follow's the question of what will suit God and meet the needs of such a remarkable state of things.

This chapter naturally falls into four sections:

1. The Sin Offering of the Priest. —This comes first, for the priest is the link between God and His people, and all the order of approach to God in His house breaks down if the priesthood goes wrong. We do not always, perhaps, remember the importance of this side of things. Hence the most striking points which specially belong to this section, are concerned first with the entrance into the holiest, viz., the sprinkling of the blood seven times before the veil of the sanctuary, and the placing of it upon the horns of the altar of fragrant incense (vers. 6, 7); and second, with the complete judgment of the sin in its root, fruit, and principles, before God (vers. 11, 12). It is here specially that we get the great principles of the sin offering. The blood taken in to secure the right of entrance, the fat removed and burnt on the burnt offering, and lastly, the whole victim burnt outside the camp.

Hebrews 13:11, 12 shows the importance of the bringing in of the blood and the corresponding burning of the victim outside the camp. The 16th of Leviticus is the only case of the blood being actually brought into the holiest, but in the first two sections of this chapter the blood is to secure the entrance there, and so the victim is burnt outside as in the case of the sin offerings of Lev. 16. The one exception to this is in Lev. 9:7-11, where the blood is not said to be brought into the sanctuary, although the bullock is burnt outside the camp.

2. The Sin Offering for the Congregation. —Here everything is according to the first sin offering, only the principles are, so to speak, taken for granted, and the special point is the work of the priest in applying the results of the sin offering to the need of the congregation when sin has broken the link of communion with God. We have the first mention of forgiveness resulting from atonement. "The priest shall make atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them" (ver. 20).

3. The Sin Offering of the Prince. —Here we have a case of one in special responsibility with special intelligence, for the two always go together. But the general state of things is right, the priest and the congregation are supposed to be in their right state. Hence we do not have the full measure, the bullock, nor the blood brought into the sanctuary, nor the victim burnt outside the camp. It is the question of the restoration of an individual to his place as a worshipper, not of the whole foundation upon which acceptable worship must rest. So we have the goat, a male, speaking specially of responsibility, slaughtered by the offerer at the place where the burnt offering was slaughtered, and the blood is put on the horns of the altar of burnt offering.

We shall see in a later chapter what becomes of the body of the victim. Thus again we find that "the priest shall make atonement for him to cleanse him from his sin, and it shall be forgiven him."

4. The Sin Offering of the Individual. —Here we have not the same responsibility or intelligence as in the case of a prince, and the victim is a female of the goat or sheep. It is only here out of the four sections that the fat is spoken of as "a sweet odor to Jehovah." In other details the

offering corresponds to the prince’s sin offering.

These are the great principles of the sin offering. I do not say much about their application, as our object is not to apply, but to find out what Scripture says about these things. It should be noticed that in each case the sin is looked at as “inadvertent,” not willful. When God has redeemed His people to Himself and come to dwell among them, He does not expect them to sin, even if in mercy that knows their feebleness, He provides for the sin. In each case, too, it is the commandments of Jehovah that are in question.

We shall come on other points connected with the priestly work in the sin offering later on.

Through an oversight the questions for both January and February were set on the Peace Offering. Hence we shall go on to the March questions now, and this will enable us to answer each month’s questions in the following issue in future.

Answers to Questions

1. Answered above.

2. 2 Chron. 21:21-24; Ezra 8:35. These are the two actual cases. Lev. 16, the day of atonement; Num. 28. and 29. for the feasts, and Neh. 10:33, for the custom of those returned from exile.

3. Heb. 1:17, 5:3, 7:27, 9:79 13, 25, 10:3, 6, 8, 11, 13:11; Luke 2:24 (from Lev, 12:8). The offerings for the cleansing of the leper included a sin offering, See Lev. 10:16-20. The failure of the priesthood throws back the responsibility in type, upon Christ. Instead of being eaten, the goat of the people’s sin offering is burnt. This becomes the established order in Lev. 16.

Subject for April.

—The Trespass Offering, Lev. 5.-6, 7. The following questions may be searched out

1. What are the things which constitute trespass, in this portion of Scripture?

2. What different words are used for sin in its various aspects in Lev. 4 to 6, 7?

3. What is the principal difference between the sin and the trespass offering according to Scripture?

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