

The Way to God

The Christian in this present Church Age is under grace and not under the law (Rom 6:14-15). With that fact we enjoy many privileges not enjoyed by the Israelite believer under the Law. One key difference was how each group was to approach God. For us the Cross and the judging of sin is history. For the Israelite under the Law, the Cross and the judgment of sin was yet future. That simple fact made all the difference in the world in how each group was/is allowed to interact with God.

There was a barrier that stood between the Israelite, which was sin not yet judged personified in the Law and symbolized by the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. That veil stood as a virtually impenetrable barrier that separated sinful man from the most holy part of the Temple. It was said to be very thick and unable to be ripped apart by teams of oxen.

No one except the high priest could enter behind the veil and then only once a year on Yom Kippur, which we will get into later. Because sin had not yet been dealt with during the Age of the Law, Holy God was compelled to maintain His distance from sinful man. Thus, man could approach God only so far and then through a mediator in the form of a specialized priesthood — the Levitical priests of the family of Levi.

And then came the Cross. Jesus the Christ was nailed upon it, and He took the sins of the world upon Himself, and He was judged in our stead. And the barrier that stood between the believer and God, that veil in the Temple, was rent in two by the Cross (Mat 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) signifying that the barrier of sin had been dealt with, introducing a new way for man to approach God directly without the need of an intermediary in the office of a formal priesthood.

Heb 4:14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence

draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The believer in this Church Age has the authority to “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” directly and without a priest. That is because sin has been judged and one of the benefits of being a believer is we possess the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Rom 3:21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

God looks at the Church Age believer boldly approaching the throne of Grace and does not see his sins but sees the imputed righteousness of Christ. We can go directly to God. The Israelite under the Law was limited in that respect.

Yes, he could pray, but prayers were in the context of the Law and especially in the context of the Levitical offerings at the Temple. It appears that for some indued with the Spirit, they could go directly to God.

What we are going to look at now is how the Israelite under the Law related to God because the Law was very specific in how the Israelite was allowed to approach Him. The Christian today is the Temple and we enjoy the indwelling of God.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

The believer under the Law did not have such privilege, at least not on a universal level. For the Jew under the Law, God resided not in the believer but in the Tabernacle/Temple in the form of His Shekinah Glory in the Holy of Holies. In doing so, God maintained His distance from sinful man

Ex 40:34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

This rather long passage shows how the smoke and fire related to the presence of God's glory in the Tabernacle and regulated when the Israelites in the wilderness were to camp and decamp.

Num 9:15 On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. ¹⁶ So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. ¹⁷ And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped. ¹⁸ At the command of the Lord the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the Lord they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. ¹⁹ Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did not set out. ²⁰ Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the Lord they remained in camp; then according to the command of the Lord they set out. ²¹ And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. ²² Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out. ²³ At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out. They kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses.

God allowed only the High Priest to approach Him behind the veil of the Holy of Holies and only once a year as previously noted. The common Israelite could approach God only so far as the outer courts and only through the Levitical priesthood and a system of sacrifices. The priests could go into the Tabernacle (or Temple), called the Holy Place, but not into

the Holy of Holies. Through this process defined in the Law, Holy God meets sinful man halfway but maintains a respectable distance from him.

Leviticus and the Law

The Jews especially revere the first five books to the Bible, the Pentateuch, as something very special to them. They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books are at the very heart of their identity as Jews and covers their history from Abraham through all the aspects of the Law that was given him by God. The last four books contain a LOT of detail relating to the Mosaic Covenant and the Law. Exodus chapters 25-40 speaks of the construction of the Tabernacle and articles of worship. Leviticus is where most of the meat is concerning the Law, while Numbers and Deuteronomy have further details and builds upon what was spelled out in Leviticus. We will now take a look at what is in Leviticus.

This will not be a verse-by-verse study of Leviticus, which would take months, thus I will attempt to limit the details to what is important to our understanding of the Law of Moses. If you really want the detail, and it is worth the effort, I suggest you start reading in Exodus 25 and plow all the way through Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. A good study Bible might be helpful to clarify some of what you will read.

Our focus will be on what the Law required of the Israelite who had to live under its ordinances, the meanings of some of that, and how it pointed to Christ.

Ordinances (The Rules)

The Law laid down an extensive set of rules by which the nation was to live under. Let me repeat that the Law was never intended to be a system by which the Israelite could find salvation. It might lead them to faith but the Israelite could not be saved by keeping the Law. One reason was it was impossible to keep the Law.

The Law Covenant was created as a system by which the nation would be managed and as a teaching aid concerning God's perfect righteousness

and His plan of salvation. In the Law there are 613 different rules of life that ranged from what we commonly recognize as sin, to dress codes, social conduct, dietary restrictions, sabbath observances, health issues, various sacrifices, and feast days required to be observed. A few examples:

Clean and Unclean

Clean and unclean creatures (Lev 11:1-47) — This called for the Israelite to abstain from eating certain animals, birds, and sea creatures because they were declared as “unclean”. It should be understood that unclean does mean dirty in the sense of hygiene or unhealthy to consume but relates more to the idea of being ceremonially unclean. It is unclear exactly what was meant by this term, and many opinions have been offered. One proposition was that the animals so declared as unclean were generally carriers of some form of disease transmittable to humans, which is the case with some such as pigs and rabbits but not all on the list. Some posit that the meat of these unclean creatures spoiled rapidly and became corrupted. They had no refrigeration and only drying or salt to preserve food.

Animals not cloven-footed and chewed their cuds were generally excluded as unclean. This excluded the pigs and camels, for example. It also excluded carnivores and birds of prey such as eagles and buzzards, presumably because they might have been in contact with something dead, which has its own set of “unclean” rules. It also excluded shellfish of various kinds. While the rationale for the classifications is still debated, the objective is clear, and that is to set the Israelite apart from his neighbors as God’s holy people. Also, these distinctions in the dietary realm might serve to remind the Israelite to make similar distinctions in the area of morals.

This prohibition no longer applies in the Church Age.

Acts 10:10 ... (Peter) fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

That word translated “common” in this context means Levitically unclean, and “unclean” means unclean in a ceremonial sense. Peter is referring to the food prohibitions under the Law. Obviously, at least some of the “all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air” contained in the “great sheet” were on the list of foods prohibited under the Law. But God is saying that no longer applies and orders Peter to eat. V15 “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

Women were also declared unclean during menstruation and after giving birth. Interestingly, if she bore a female child the period of uncleanness was twice as long than if she had a son (two weeks vs one week). It is not clear why this is the case (Lev 12:1-8).

Leprous diseases and purification (Lev 13:1-14:57) — This series of passages focuses on Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) and similar diseases. It specifies how the priest is to diagnose the disease and treatments along with provisions for the infected to be declared clean once again if he is healed. Hansen’s Disease was not actually seen in the Middle East until the first century BC but other similar afflictions and viruses were prevalent prior to that.

Discharges from males and female reproductive organs (Lev 15:1-33) — This includes both natural (intercourse) and disease related discharges. This is not a suggestion that sex is unclean because God created the reproductive process.

Obviously, this is not a conclusive list of issues covered under the Law of Moses but is some of what is found in Leviticus. Numbers and Deuteronomy have many other issues that require addressing by the Israelite under the Law.

Offerings

Laws of blood sacrifice, ceremonial ablutions, and religious festivals abound in the ceremonial laws of the Mosaic Covenant. The ceremony was the means of regular reinforcement and instruction, as well as the vehicle

of worship. The sacrifices were theological preparation for the Messiah's atoning work.

Under the Law, the Israelite was required to make certain offerings and sacrifices for various reasons. Some were giving back to the Lord in worship and thanks for a bountiful harvest and others dealt with sin as we shall see. There are five main categories of offerings.

Burnt Offering

What is offered — A bullock, or a sheep, or a goat, or two turtle doves, according to the ability of the offerer were offered. If of the herd or flock, it had to be a year old and without blemish.

Offerer's work — Offerer lead the offering to the door of the Tabernacle, laid his hand on it, slew it, skinned it, and cut it into pieces. Washed the parts and gave it to the priest (Lev 1:14-17).

The priest's work — The priest caught the blood, sprinkled it around the alter and placed the parts in order on the alter, thus it was called a "whole burnt offering".

God's portion — All that was burned up on the alter.

The priests portion — The skin (Lev 7:8).

The offerer's portion — Nothing.

Symbolism — Complete consecration of the offerer to God (Rom 12:1).

Typical Teaching — Christ giving Himself as a whole burnt offering on the alter of the Cross (Eph 5:2; Heb 9:14).

Meal Offering

What is offered — Unbaked flour ground fine, or baked cakes, or green ears of corn, parched or roasted. It was mixed with oil, seasoned with salt,

the fire was sprinkled with frankincense. It must contain no leaven or honey.

Offerer's work — The offerer simply brought the offering to the priest.

Priest's work — The priest threw a handful of the offering and all of the frankincense on the Alter fire.

God's portion — The handful of the offering with the frankincense.

The priest's portion — The remainder of the offering (Lev 6:14-18).

The offerer's portion — Nothing.

Symbolism — The consecration of the offer's toil and what God had blessed them with.

Typical Teaching — Christ's life and work offered to God as perfect and fragrant.

Peace Offering

What is offered — A bullock, a lamb, or a goat, male or female.

Offerer's work — The offerer led the offering to the door of the Tabernacle, laid his hands upon it, killed it, opened it, took out the fat and kidneys, and gave it to the priest to be burned.

Priest's work — The priest caught the blood, sprinkled it around the Alter and waved the breast and right shoulder before the Lord.

God's portion — All that was burned.

The priest's portion — The waved breast and shoulder.

The offerer's portion — The remainder of the offering which he must eat with his family and friends in the court of the tabernacle (Deut 12: 5-12).

Symbolism — Reconciling the offerer with God

Typical teaching — Christ is our Peace Offering (Rom 5:1; Col 1:20).

Sin Offering

What is offered — A bullock, or goat (male or female), or lamb according to the position of the offerer.

Offerer's work — The offerer led the offering to the door of the Tabernacle, laid his hands upon it, killed it, opened it, took out the fat and kidneys, and gave it to the priest to be burned.

Priest's work — The priest, if for others, smears the blood on the horns of the Alter and pours out the rest at the base of the Alter. If for the nation, sprinkle the blood before the veil and on the horns of the Alter of Incense then pour out the rest at the base of the Alter.

God's portion — Everything that was not consumed on the Alter was burned outside the camp.

The priest's portion — All that remained of the meat could be consumed by the priests.

The offerer's portion — Nothing.

Symbolism — Forgiveness of the sins of the offerer.

Typical teaching — Christ is our sin offering (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24).

Trespass Offering

What is offered — Female lamb or kid, or two turtle doves, or two young pigeons, or 1/10th part of ephah of flour. according to the ability of the offerer. It must contain no oil or frankincense.

Offerer's work — The offerer led the offering to the door of the Tabernacle, laid his hands upon it, killed it, opened it, took out the fat and kidneys, and gave it to the priest to be burned. (Same as sin offering.)

Priest's work — The priest, if for others, smears the blood on the horns of the Alter and pours out the rest at the base of the Alter. If for the nation, sprinkle the blood before the veil and on the horns of the Alter of Incense then pour out the rest at the base of the Alter. (Same as sin offering.)

God's portion — All that was burned on the Alter.

The priest's portion — What was not burned on the Alter.

The offerer's portion — Nothing.

Symbolism — Restitution for sin.

Typical teaching — Christ is our trespass offering (Col 2:13-14; 2 Cor 5:19).

The first three offerings: the Burnt Offering, Meal Offering, and the Peace Offering, are called "Sweet Savor" offerings. The last two: the Sin Offering and Trespass Offerings, are called Restoring Offerings.

Tabernacle/Temple

Two key elements of these offerings and the ones we will look at later under the subject of the Feast Days of the Lord are the Tabernacle, which was the tent that was the center of worship mainly while the Israelites were on the move, and later the Temple that was built by Solomon. Both share the same basic layout, but the Tabernacle was designed to be portable and move with the children of Israel in their forty years in the wilderness, while the Temple was a building of stone and wood permanently located in Jerusalem.

The Tabernacle was also known as the Tent of the Congregation was the portable earthly dwelling place of Yahweh used by the Israelites from the

Exodus until the conquest of Canaan. Moses was instructed at Mount Sinai how to construct and transport the tabernacle with the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness and their subsequent conquest of the Promised Land. After 440 years, Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem superseded it as the dwelling-place of God.

The main source describing the tabernacle is the Book of Exodus, specifically Exodus 25–31 and 35–40. Those passages describe an inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, created by the veil suspended by four pillars and was a ten cubics cube. This sanctuary contained the Ark of the Covenant, with its cherubim-covered mercy seat. An outer sanctuary (the "Holy Place") contained a gold lamp-stand or candlestick. On the north side stood a table, on which lay the showbread. On the south side was the Menorah, holding seven oil lamps to give light. On the west side, just before the veil, was the golden altar of incense. The veil was constructed of 4 woven layers of curtains and 48 15-foot tall standing wood boards overlaid in gold and held in place by its bars and silver sockets and was richly furnished with valuable materials taken from Egypt at God's command.

The Tabernacle was always set up with its entrance facing east. The Temple in Jerusalem was built with its entrance facing east. Messiah is said to be coming from out of the east at the Second Advent. When camped, the 12 tribes always camped in a specific order around the Tabernacle. When they decamped, they did so in a specific order and marched in that order. It had to be all very organized and disciplined to manage so many people.

Ark of the Covenant

The ark is described in Ex 25:10-22, 37:1-9.

Exodus 37:1 Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ² And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. ³ And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. ⁴ And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold ⁵ and

put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. ⁶ And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ⁷ And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, ⁸ one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.

The Ark of the Covenant is so called because the ten commandments, or the Mosaic Covenant, were deposited in it (Num 10:33; Deut 31:26; Heb 9:4). It contained three items: the tablets of the Law, Aaron's rod that budded, and the pot of manna. It is also called the Ark of the Testimony, because it witnessed God's holiness and the people of Israel's sinfulness (Ex 25:16, 22). It is also called the Ark of God to indicate God's presence with Israel (1 Sam 3:3, 4:11).

As a symbol of divine presence, the ark was carried at the head of the column in the wilderness or later the army, thus indicating divine protection of the Jews while in transit (Num 10:33; Deut 1:33; Ps 132:8).

The ark of the covenant was involved in the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 3:11-17, 4:7, 11, 18) where it held back the water. The ark was used as an offensive weapon on Jericho (Josh 6:4-12).

The ark was later captured by the Philistines but they had nothing but trouble with it, so they sent it back (1 Sam 4:3-11 cf 5:7, 7:2).

The ark stayed at Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 7:2) until David moved the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:1-19). At one point it was about to slide off the cart and an escort reached out to push it back onto the cart and died immediately for touching it. The Ark could be handled only by select people.

Solomon had the ark put in the temple when it was built (1 Kg 8:6-9). It stayed there except during the reign of Manasseh, who put up phallic images in the Holy of Holies. It was later restored by the Levites (2 Chr 35:3).

The ark was destroyed in 586 B.C. under the fifth cycle of discipline by Nebuchadnezzar. There is no record of it ever being replaced. Why? Because it was no longer needed (Jer 3:16).

Symbolism in the Ark:

1. The wood represents Christ's humanity, the gold His deity.
2. The tables of the Law represent sin in the sense of transgression of known divine laws.
3. Aaron's rod that budded represents sin in revolt against God's
4. order.
5. The pot of manna represents sin as rejection of God's provision.
6. Sin inside the ark is a picture of the work of the cross. Christ bore our sins inside of Himself.
7. The mercy seat is God's side of the cross. The cherubs represent the perfect righteousness and justice of the Father, both of which are satisfied by the blood of Christ, sprinkled on the mercy seat.
8. In the Millennium the presence of Christ replaces the ark.

The Priesthood

The priesthood was also very organized and disciplined. Only descendants of the tribe of Levi could be a priest, thus the name Levitical Priesthood. The Tribe of Levi descended from Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah. In order to qualify for the priesthood, the father of the candidate had to be of the clan of Levi, but the mother need only be a Jew of any tribe, but she *must* be a Jew. Paternity determined potential membership in the priesthood and maternity determined the Jew's identification as the physical seed of Abraham. Bloodlines of the Levites were carefully recorded in the Temple.

The Tribe of Levi served particular religious duties for the Israelites and had political and educational responsibilities as well. In return, the landed tribes were expected to support the Levites with a tithe (Num 18:21–25), particularly the tithe known as the First tithe, ma'aser rishon. The Kohanim, a subset of the Levites, were the priests, who performed the work of

holiness in the Temple. The Levites, referring to those who were not Kohanim, were assigned to other duties in and around the Temple.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan (Joshua 13:33), the Sons of Levi were the only Israelite tribe that received cities but were not allowed to be landowners "because the Lord the God of Israel Himself is their inheritance" (Deuteronomy 18:2). Neither will they have land ownership in the Millennium.

In modern times, Levites are integrated in Jewish communities, but keep a distinct status. There are estimated 300,000 Levites among Ashkenazi Jewish communities, and a similar number among Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews combined. The total percentage of Levites among the wider Jewish population is about 4%.

Some modern Jewish names you may be familiar with that are usually associated with being a Levite descendant are Cohen or Kohen (from Kohanim), Epstein, Levi, Horowitz or Hurwitz, Herzog, Lear, Lewi, Segal, and Zimmel to name just a few. This doesn't mean that everyone with one of these last names would qualify as a Levite or even be a Jew.

Orthodox Judaism believes in the eventual rebuilding of a Temple in Jerusalem and a resumption of the Levitical role. There are a small number of schools, primarily in Israel, to train priests and Levites in their respective roles. Levite lineages have and are being researched, and the articles of worship such as vestments and worship utensils have already been designed and produced by Orthodox Jews in Israel, according to various reports. The Temple will be rebuilt and there will be a return to Temple worship during the Tribulation along with restoration of the sacrificial system. Keep in mind that the Tribulation has nothing to do with the Church but will be a return to the Age of Israel, the last seven years of the prophecy in Daniel 9.

There will be also be a formal system of worship after the Tribulation during the Millennium when the Son of David, Messiah, sits on His throne in Jerusalem. While it will resemble the system under the Mosaic Covenant, it will not be a return to the Law of Moses and that system of worship. Like the Church and the Lord's Table, this Millennial System will be one of

remembrance of what Messiah did and will include only some aspects of the Levitical system.

The only Levites allowed to serve in the Millennial Temple (Third Temple) will be those who are descendants of Zadoc (Eze 40:46; 43:19). It was the priest Zadoc who remained true and supported David during the Absalom revolution when everyone else turned against him. Other Levites will have subordinate serving roles to play.