

Vayikra **And He Called**
Torah: Leviticus 1:1-6:7 (5:26)
Haftarah: Isaiah 43:21-44:23
Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 10:1-18

This week, we begin our examination of the amazing Book of Leviticus. Originally, it was not intended for public consumption, but was a guide for the priests and the Levites concerning sacrificial procedures and ritual purity – along with some pretty stern warnings against forbidden unions. You see, each of the 54 weekly portions in the annual cycle, use the first subject phrase of the portion as its title. This is also the case with each of the five books of the Torah.

Leviticus starts with the phrase: “and YHVH called to Moses from the tent of meeting”. The portion is simply called: “And He Called” because of the rabbi's traditional, but strange reluctance to pronounce the sacred name. The first thing we should notice is that the call came from the tent of meeting. During the construction of the tabernacle, Moses' tent was called the tent of meeting. There are not many indications in the Book that Moses had to make the strenuous climb up and down the mountain, whenever G-d wanted to communicate with him.

What follows are several detailed instructions about the sacrificial procedures for the various kinds of offerings. There is a significant underlying principle to explain why the detailed sacrificial procedures had to be followed so rigorously.

Our lives are filled with so much uncertainty, that we often risk becoming disoriented and overwhelmed by all that is happening to us. When it comes to worship, the L-RD does not want us to be haphazard in the way we present ourselves and our offerings. He is not against spontaneity when we face different challenges in our lives and He wants us to remain firmly flexible as we discover creative new ways to apply the eternal truths of His Word into every area of our lives.

But when it comes to worship, He wants us to step outside of the chaos and uncertainty of our lives and realign our inner being with the unspeakable harmony and order which swirls around the King of Glory AND which is the true driving force behind the orderly functioning of the cosmos..

With this in mind, we affirm that worship should be orderly without becoming needlessly rigid or pedantic. This is why the procedural instructions are given so that all can be done decently and in order, without becoming choked with the strangulating minutia with plagues so many stale liturgical services.

Worship should be geared to the annual festival cycle and in the times of the tabernacle and the temple, these biblical guidelines developed into the rich worship procedures which made these special times awesome and even regal. The priest's decorative garments also reflected the intimate contact between Heaven and Earth which their ministry bridged. Our Messiah remains the only true bridge between Heaven and Earth – in reality and not just symbolically.

Worship should be a calm refuge from the chaos which our lives have to wade through and these sets of sacrificial procedures dramatically attested to the place of rest and harmony which

was at the core of tabernacle and temple worship. In fact, the peace and harmony of our Eternal King was demonstrated through these orderly sacrificial and worship rituals.

Now that the temple is gone and we no longer have an altar upon which to offering sacrifices, where does that leave us as we endeavour to still bridge the gap between Heaven and the Earth? Three things. First, we can remember the majestic, beautiful harmony of the sacrificial system and organize our worship and our devotion according to similar principles .

Next, as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, we fully and freely acknowledge that the entire sacrificial system was completely fulfilled in what our Messiah accomplished for us on the cross. So we see that each ritual of sacrifice and each sacrificial element symbolically reflected for us what the Messiah actually accomplished for us in reality.

The only sacrifice which He still requires from us is the sacrifice of praise. Having faith in His Word and practicing obedience to its teachings, are the spiritual staples of our existence and form the solid basis from which acceptable, authentic worship is offered.

Lastly, Talmudic Jews recite all of the sacrifices daily as a form of prayer and ask that these prayers might be accepted as equivalent to the actual sacrifices which were offered before the destruction of the temple. While this is a nice thought, these sacrifices have been fulfilled and no longer have to be repeated daily as a form of prayer offering.

Also, there is no biblical mandate for the repetition of these sacrifices as a form of prayer which somehow actually replaces the sacrifices which were actually performed. Symbolism and symbolic acts creatively depict reality, without becoming a form of reality themselves. The reality of our Messiah's actual sacrifice on the cross testifies to the complete fulfillment of these amazing symbolic rituals.

They should be studied to understand their Messianic implications and they should be remembered as relics of a time when they were actually performed. They should not be constantly repeated as some kind of prayer as if they were still some kind of active performance requirement. They should also remind us to step out of the chaos and darkness which our lives have to deal with and to step into the peaceful light of the Messiah's presence and be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

Join us as we travel through this amazing book and study the awesome wonder of an intricate sacrificial system which our Messiah so completely fulfilled. We need to make our lives revolve around our walk with Him according to the stipulations of His Word and neither be pulled away from the light we have been delivered into, nor descend into the snare of endless repetitions which render so much liturgy dull and burdensome. Worship is intended to be anything but dull and burdensome.

How is your sacrifice of praise doing? Does its majesty and beauty reflect that which occurred in the tabernacle and in the temple? May it be peaceful and dynamic and truly and regularly, bridge the gap between Heaven and Earth on our long journey through this fading world to our eternal home in our Messiah's Kingdom in Glory.

Sermon: What Have You Done With My Son?

Passage: *“Behold I stand at the door and I knock. If someone hears my voice and opens*

the door, I will come in to Him and I will dine with him and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20)

Today marks a significant spiritual milestone for me. It is the sabbath closest to the 30th of March, which is the date when I accepted the Messiah into my heart at the age of 19. In 1972, Maundy Thursday fell on March 30, and I accepted the L-RD around midnight, which would have made it the 16 of Nissan, or the Festival of First Fruits on the Hebrew calendar.

We know that dates on the Hebrew calendar move around on the Gregorian calendar which most of the world uses. This is because, in order to keep the Hebrew calendar aligned with the cycles of the sun and the moon, seven times every nineteen years, we add a leap month (second month of Adar). So I actually have two spiritual birthdays, one on the Hebrew calendar (Festival of First Fruits) and another on the Gentile calendar (Maundy Thursday). In the year when I accepted the L-rd, these two festival fell on the same day.

Both dates are important. On the Gentile calendar, Maundy Thursday remembers the Passover Seder where the Messiah mandated the L-rd's Table and is the day before Good Friday. On the Hebrew calendar, March 30th actually corresponds to the Second Day of Passover, since I accepted the L-rd after sundown. The Second Day of Passover is actually the Festival of First Fruits, which is the third celebration of a new festival cycle.

So, in 1972, I accepted the L-rd during the week of Passover and I am a First Fruits baby in the L-rd. Historically the week of Unleavened Bread came to be known as the Week of Passover and the Festival of First Fruits is not really observed during this period.

I am blown away that I came to faith when our people were celebrating their exodus from Egypt and were participating in their seven day march, which they undertook to walk out of Egyptian held territory. So today, I would like to share with you about my journey into the light and speak to you about how you can also share about your journey of how you came to faith, whether it is dramatic or not. So hang on to your seats, here we go!

I was born in what became Zimbabwe on January 8th, 1953 and Elvis Presley was 18 years old when I was born. We share the same birthday. In order to avoid the civil war which nearly destroyed my home country, my parents immigrated to Canada in June of 1959. My mother was an assimilated Jew, married to an Anglican whose faith lapsed soon after our arrival in this beautiful country. I was raised by immigrants in a dysfunctional secular home and as a late blooming book worm, I was bullied into oblivion in Junior High School.

I couldn't figure out why people despised me so much and I became convinced that I was somehow defective and even broken. I quickly sank into a deep depression which I tried to hide behind a big smile and lots of humour. I adopted a number of escape, coping mechanisms which included the compulsive reading of escape adventure literature, where I could imagine that I was somebody else and not stuck in a life which was slowly choking me out and making me frequently suicidal. Somehow, part of me did not want to give those loser bullies the satisfaction of knowing that they hurt me so badly that I took my own life. There had to be something better somewhere and I was going to survive long enough to find it.

I was just trying to survive, but my level of constant emotional pain was extremely debilitating. In grade nine, I began a long term fascination with Theravada Buddhism, so I could pull my soul out of the mud of life and escape from the relentless cycle of pain I was trapped in. I never

hooked up with other Buddhists, but remained fascinated by the aura of peace and tranquility the Buddha seemed to offer, but which I was never able to access.

In High School, I discovered girls, booze and then drugs, anything to dull the pain and help me to keep moving on. Somehow, I managed to graduate from High School and enrolled in the University of Calgary. At the same time, things got so tense for me at home that I moved into the dorms, away from my family which bogged me down so badly.

There were several evangelical Christians on my floor and I greatly enjoyed messing with their minds. At the same time, I knew that my life was on the verge of collapse and I did not know how much longer I could go on without experiencing a total systems shut down. I still managed to study, and I even enjoyed some of my classes, even though my depression was deepening, along with my consumption of drugs.

One night one of the evangelicals gave me a pamphlet about a Hindu man who became a Christian. I was so incensed that I barged into his dorm room and began a long, heated argument, while his roommate silently prayed. We were getting nowhere when he blurted out a sentence that changed my life and is still impacting me. He said: "Mike, forget about all this other stuff, one day, when you die, you are going to stand before G-d and the only thing He is going to ask you is: what have you done with My Son?"

Suddenly I had a vision of the Cross coming down through the ceiling and striking me on the forehead. I lost the ability to speak and they knew I was experiencing conviction. A few days later, the Christian came to my dorm room and quoted the verse to me which I am using as the basis for my meditation. He said: "Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart, don't keep Him waiting, let Him come in!"

Once he left, I went back to my French homework and the next sentence I had to translate from English into French was: "Don't keep him waiting, let him come in." I was totally blown away and later that night, I surrendered my heart to my celestial door knocker. It will soon be 48 years since that glorious night and the peace which His presence has provided me with has sustained me ever since, even through some of the most challenging and incredible experiences which a chubby little British boy should ever have to face.

Many years later, I eventually discovered my Jewishness and a lot of things began to make sense. I am in my 24th year of Torah observance as a Messianic believer, which will soon be equal to one half of my spiritual journey in the Messiah. Every year of my walk with our King has been amazing, even if they were also too often fraught with pain and suffering. But my years as a Messianic Jewish rabbi have been even more awesome, even though they have surpassed my former years in their ability to also be even more fraught with pain and suffering. I can really relate to the words of the 23rd Psalm – peace in a tsunami!

Our walk with our Messiah is awesome, even when some of the places we have to walk through, leave a lot to be desired. In the Messiah I have often experienced great heartbreak and betrayal, but He has never left me nor forsaken me. He continues to be my faithful Good Shepherd who alone has the words of Life Everlasting and constant peace and joy.

When we look at people around us and see the spiritual struggles they are going through, we need to realize that our Messiah continues to knock on the door of their hearts and we have to be patient and wait for them to open the door and invite Him in. Once they do, He will enter and

their lives will become a perpetual banquet of peace and joy, no matter what else they have to endure on their way home to our Father's Home in Glory. No matter how much they kick and scream (I did more than my fair share of kicking and screaming), He is still at work in their lives.

Let me ask you all a question. Have you opened the door of your heart or are you still keeping Him waiting? As my 48th spiritual birthday approaches, I would like to teach you how to share your own story, because often, the more we tell it, the better we understand it.

There are four basic steps in learning how to effectively share your story (testimony).

You speak first about what your life was like before you came into contact with the Gospel message of the Torah. It is not necessary to go into great detail and I usually avoid going into details of a very private nature.. This section of your story could last from 30 seconds to 30 minutes, depending on which content you are directed to share. Remember you are getting ready to introduce the Gospel and the Messiah and it should not all be about you. It is a special kind of spiritual biography where the Messiah stands dead center.

Next, you speak how you first came into contact with the Gospel message of our beloved Messiah. If you were lucky enough to be born into a stable, believing home, you could mention the first time you became aware that the message of the Gospel was directed at you personally. Again, this second step could last from 30 seconds to thirty minutes as you move towards introducing your listener(s) to the most amazing person on the planet – our Messiah.

Then comes the clincher – how you finally and personally gave your heart to the Messiah. Some people cannot remember an exact moment when they gave their heart to Him because it was a gradual process. As long as these people know that they have everlasting life and that the Messiah dwells in their hearts by faith. For some of us this can be the story of how we gave our hearts back to the Messiah, after a period of wandering away from Him. When did you first become aware of His presence in your heart?

I came to faith as a confused young hippy who did not understand much about the Bible, but bottom line, I knew that I had everlasting life and that the rest of it would eventually work itself out. I do not want to give the impression that my earlier depression suddenly and completely disappeared. But in the L-rd, a ladder suddenly appeared and instead of angels going up and down on it, I was able to be lifted out of my depression, issue by issue and often day by day, as I learned to seek His face in His Word for answers to my questions.

Learning to walk with the Messiah according to His Word is the most exciting and satisfying journey this life has to offer. Coming to faith personally, nearly 48 years ago was the beginning of a daily journey that is still ongoing, which brings us to the fourth stage of this sharing of your spiritual story. It is time to speak about the changes you have made and encountered as you have grown and matured in the L-rd. You speak about all the enrichment your new found faith has brought into your life and how the Messiah continues to sustain you as you wander through deep valleys and scale scary, high mountains under His full protection and complete provision. There is not other life like it.

I often hesitate to talk about all the creepy believers who walk boldly in the flesh and resist the voice of G-d's Spirit through His Word. But I will not defend them and will readily acknowledge their existence and pray for double wisdom. First, how to handle them when they try to infect us with their folly and next how not to follow suit as we learn to grow the fruit of the Spirit and

weed out the works of the flesh. So, in a way, I will talk generally about how the Messiah has helped me and sustained me, despite all the creepy people I have had to plow through and all the sad and bad experiences I have had to come to terms with as part of what it means to walk with the L-rd.

Your recitation of your story can be as long or as short as you deem appropriate, whether it is a few minutes or a longer time. Over the years I have given my testimony (my spiritual story) in just a few minutes and at other times, up to an hour. It is the same story; it was just a different context and I adapted my presentation to it.

If you are not able to get all the way through, either because of time constraints or because of interruptions and questions, relax and let the Messiah keep knocking. Avoid arguing. Try to answer their sincere questions and if they insist on becoming contentious, shut things down as you continue to shine at them and be salty, while you wait for them to finally open up.

It took a long time for me to open up and if the truth be told, the most difficulty I have sharing has been with friends and family members. I have learned not to argue and to be patient and realize that their issues may take longer than we would like. If they are not ready, we will still love them and not hound them, as we wait for the opportune moment to share. If it seems like it is never coming, pray and wait and remember how patient G-d is with you.

I have had a very interesting life in the L-rd, in four languages and five cultures. I have a very curious mind full of questions and the L-rd has been answering them one by one in His time. People have tried to shake my faith, but their reasoning is usually so flawed. Sometimes some really nice people believe some really strange things, while at other times, some really strange people believe some good things.

In some cases, it will take to the Day of Judgment to sort some people out and sometimes we have to learn to leave some people to the hand of the L-rd. I know how I came to faith and why I have stayed in the faith when so many others have ditched or become so choked and compromised. I determined to walk according to His Word and to get my answers from this good source. Sometimes the best answer we can get is Deut. 29:29 (the secret things belong to G-d, but the things which He has revealed to us belong to us and our children forever, that we may put them into practice)— a nice way of saying none of your business.

Dig deep roots into His Word. Allow His peace and love and joy to give you a new song to sing and a new approach to life. 48 years is too short a time to spend knowing the L-rd and walking with Him. It is always worth it to walk with the L-rd and to trust in Him for every area of our lives. It doesn't seem like forty eight years, but each new year is a fresh opportunity to see what good things He is going to bring my way, along with all the trials and detours I may be ask to survive. Greater is He who is in us, than the one who is in the world.

Be blessed with peace and love and joy. Shabbat shalom and shavua tov (have a good week).