TWENTY-NINTH MESSAGE:
OTHER FACTORS DISQUALIFYING AN ANIMAL FROM BEING USED IN AN OFFERING
Leviticus 22:26-33

Introduction

This MESSAGE names three other factors that disqualified animals from being acceptable as offerings to Jehovah. It completed Jehovah’s instructions concerning the way fire-offerings were to be presented to Him, and it closes with a challenge to keep the commandments exactly as Jehovah commanded them.

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Interpretation

CHAPTER 22

Introductory note (22:26)

Verse 26. And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,

Another MESSAGE of Jehovah to Moses is introduced with these words.

A. An animal disqualified if under a week old (22:27)

Verse 27. A bull or a sheep or a goat, when it has been born and has been with its mother seven days, then from the eighth day and on, it will be acceptable as a fire-offering to Jehovah.

To be used as an offering at The Tabernacle, a bull, sheep, or goat was to be at least eight days old. It was to be old enough to be strong and relatively independent. An animal in its first week of life had not developed enough to adequately represent a human life or a genuine spiritual experience with God. Also, it had not attained sufficient value to be a worthy offering to Jehovah. Thus, an animal less than a week old was disqualified from use as a fire-offering.

B. An animal disqualified if offered with its offspring (22:28)

Verse 28. And a head of cattle or one of the flock, you must not slaughter it and its son in one day.

An animal and one of its offspring were not to be slaughtered for use as altar offerings on the same day. The word translated “slaughter” is the regular word used for slaughtering animals at the altar. It was sometimes used to refer to slaughtering an animal for other purposes, but its regular use was for slaughtering animals to be used as offerings. In this verse, it definitely applied to animals slaughtered at the altar as offerings to God (see comments on Lev. 1:5 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And he shall kill the bull). The commandment applied to animals of either gender. The word translated “head of cattle” referred to a beef of either sex (see comments on Lev. 4:10 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading the head of cattle of the slaughter-offering of peace-offerings). The word translated “one of the flock” referred to any animal of the flock, that is, a sheep or a goat of either gender (see comments on Lev. 5:7 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading And if his hand does not extend [enough] to bring one from the flock). The word translated “son” means literally a male offspring, but it was regularly applied to both people and animals of both genders. The
prohibition in this verse applied to all animals offered at the altar. No animal of any gender was to be offered at the altar with one of its offspring of either gender.

Probably the reason for this prohibition was that offering an animal with its offspring was a practice of pagan religions of the time, similar to seething a kid in its mother’s milk (Ex. 23:19; Deut. 14:21). Not a great deal is known about these pagan practices, but other warnings against pagan practices seem to indicate that this explanation is the best way to understand the reason for this prohibition (Lev. 18:2-18,21; 19:4,26b,27,28,31; 22:24-25). Likely the pagan practice of offering an animal and its offspring together was related to practices of fertility cults, which were so fascinating to the pagans of that day. The Israelites were not offer their offerings in ways that seemed to resemble similar offerings of pagan and fertility religions.

C. A thanksgiving slaughter-offering disqualified if not eaten the same day (22:29-30)

Verses 29-30. 29 And when you slaughter a slaughter-offering of thanksgiving to Jehovah, you must slaughter [it] [properly] for you to be accepted.

30 It must be eaten on the same day. You must not leave any of it until morning. I am Jehovah.

A slaughter-offering symbolized fellowship among the worshiper, Jehovah, and Jehovah’s ministers (see comments on Lev. 3:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a slaughter-offering of peace offerings). It could be offered to accompany payment of a vow or a voluntary gift or to express thanksgiving. A variation in the ceremony was commanded for each of the three occasions (see comments on Lev. 7:12-21 in MESSAGE 7 and on Lev. 22:23 in MESSAGE 28). These verses repeat instructions already given that a slaughter-offering for thanksgiving was to be eaten on the same day the offering was presented at the altar. If eaten later, not just the portion eaten incorrectly, but the whole offering, became foul and repulsive to Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 7:18 in MESSAGE 7). These verses add that, not only the offering, but also the worshiper was not accepted. Instead of being blessed, the offerer was guilty and subject to punishment, because his action showed that he had not offered the offering in the right spirit. So, leaving some of the meat to eat after the first day disqualified the animal and made the offering unacceptable, even if it otherwise possessed all the necessary qualities. Though this instruction had been given earlier, it was repeated in this MESSAGE to complete the catalog of factors that disqualified an animal from being acceptable as an offering. The same disqualification applied to a slaughter-offering for a vow or a voluntary gift that was eaten after the second day. That fact is not mentioned here because it had already been stressed in three earlier MESSAGES (see comments on Lev. 7:16-18 in MESSAGE 7, on Lev. 19:5-8 in MESSAGE 23, and on Lev. 22:18-25 in MESSAGE 28). Therefore, this brief notice was enough of a reminder.

Conclusion: Challenge to keep the commandments concerning the offerings (22:31-33)

Verses 31-33. 31 And you shall keep my commandments and do them. I am Jehovah.

32 And you must not profane My holy name, and I will be hallowed among the people of Israel. I am Jehovah, who is hallowing you

33 And who is bringing you out of the land of Egypt to be God to you. I am Jehovah.

This MESSAGE completed the instructions concerning the offerings. It was appropriate that it should close with a challenge to the Israelites to obey all the instructions that had been given concerning the offerings. The offerings were to teach the Israelites to be a people separated form the unbelieving peoples of the world and unto Jehovah. Failing to keep Jehovah’s instructions concerning the offerings would cause the Israelites to lose their distinctiveness and would make them like all the other peoples of the world. Since they bore the name of Jehovah, the moral distinctiveness of that name would be lost, and Jehovah’s name would become like all the other common, ordinary names of the world. The Israelites were to be careful not
to let that happen, because their God Jehovah was utterly distinct from every other god served by men.

Application

Christians are to be a distinct people, like no others in the world. Our way of life is to be set apart from all others. It is to be based on the wisdom and commandments of God, because only God can know what is truly right and good for the people He created. Reason, emotion, and experience have value; but they all eventually lead people to error and falsehood and thus to destruction. As Christians, we are to accept the moral authority of God and live by His commands. If we do, we will keep ourselves from destruction and the name of our God from dishonor.