

MESSAGE 28
BLEMISHES DISQUALIFYING AN ANIMAL
FROM BEING USED AS AN OFFERING
Leviticus 22:17-25

Introduction

It was not only important for a priest to be properly qualified to officiate at the altar and for members of his household to be properly qualified to eat meat and bread from the offerings. It also was important for animals used in an offering to be properly qualified. It had frequently been specified in previous MESSAGES that animals used in the offerings were to be “pristine” (Lev. 1:3,10; 3:1,6; 4:3,23,32; 5:15,18; 6:6; 9:2,3; 14:10; see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a pristine male). This MESSAGE clarifies what was meant by a “pristine” animal. The blemishes that prevented it from being worthy of being used for an offering are listed. They were the same kind of blemishes that disqualified a priest from officiating at the altar, though the lists are not identical (compare blemishes listed for a priest in Lev.21:16-24 in MESSAGE 26 with blemishes listed for an animal in verses 22-25 below).

This MESSAGE has no sub-topics.

Interpretation

CHAPTER 22

Verse 17. **Again Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

This verse introduces another MESSAGE of Jehovah to Moses.

Verses 18-20. **18 Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel, And you shall say to them, A man of the house of Israel or of the sojourners in Israel who offers his offering for any vow or any voluntary gift that they may offer to Jehovah as a rededication-offering,**

19 To be accepted [it must be] a pristine male of the bulls or of the sheep or of the goats.

20 Any that has a blemish in it will not be accepted for you.

Jehovah told Moses to relay the MESSAGE to Aaron, to his sons, and to all the Israelites. All Israelites needed to be concerned with the proper selection of an animal to be offered at The Tabernacle altar, since the people brought the animals and the priests received them. Then the MESSAGE states that the regulations contained in

it applied to sojourners as well. Sojourners were people of other nations who had accepted Jehovah and had been accepted into Israel on an equal footing with home-born Israelites. All the Israel's laws applied equally to sojourners as to descendants of Jacob (see comments on Lev. 16::29b in MESSAGE 20 and on Lev. 17:8-9 in MESSAGE 21). These verses speak specifically of offerings offered as rededication-offerings, which symbolized commitment of the worshipers whole life to God (see comments on Lev. 1:3-17 in MESSAGE 1). More specifically it speaks of rededication-offerings that accompanied the payment of a vow or a voluntary gift. The difference between a vow and a voluntary gift was that a vow was a promise to give a gift at a specific date in the future, while a voluntary gift was given immediately (see comments on Lev. 7:16 in MESSAGE 7). Leviticus 7:16-18 had discussed peace-offerings used to accompany a vow or voluntary gift (see comments on those verse in MESSAGE 7). This verse shows that a rededication-offering could be used for the same purpose. When a rededication-offering was used, it symbolized that the gift expressed total dedication, whereas when peace-offerings were used, it symbolized that the gift expressed joy for fellowship among God's people and with God (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGES 1).

When a rededication-offering was used to accompany payment of a vow or a voluntary gift, the animal was to be a male, (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a pristine male). However, the animal could be a bull, a ram, or a male goat (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading of the herd, on Lev. 1:10-13 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And if his offering is of the flock, [that is] of sheep or of goats). Birds could also be used as rededication-offerings (see comments on Lev. 1:14-17 in MESSAGE 1). However, the instructions that Jehovah had given for bird rededication-offerings had said nothing about the birds' being in pristine condition. Therefore, nothing is said in this MESSAGE to define any blemishes that might make a bird unacceptable. Or perhaps birds were not appropriate to use for offerings to accompany payment of a vow or a voluntary gift, since birds were too small a gift for someone who was able to bring a significant gift.

Verse 21. And if a man offers a slaughter-offering of peace-offerings for a vow or a voluntary offering from the herd or from the flock, it must be pristine to be accepted. Any blemish must not be in it.

This verse emphasizes that animals offered as slaughter-offerings of peace offerings to accompany the payment of a vow or a voluntary gift, that animal also had to be pristine (see comments on Lev. 3:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a slaughter-offering of peace offerings). However, in that case, the animal did not have to be a male. Like a rededication-offering that accompanied a vow or a voluntary gift, it could be from the herd (cow family), a sheep, or a goat (see comments on Lev. 3:1-2,7,12-16 in MESSAGE 1). Whereas this MESSAGE emphasized that a slaughter-offering that accompanied payment of a vow or a voluntary gift had to be a "pristine" specimen, the same principle applied to all animals offered at The Tabernacle altar for any kind of offering. The pristine condition of the animals had been repeatedly stated in previous MESSAGES (see references listed in Introduction to this MESSAGE).

Verse 22. Ones blind or broken or cut or [with] a running [sore] or an itch or mange, you must not offer these to Jehovah; and you must not give them [as] a fire-offering to Jehovah on the altar.

The blemishes that kept an animal from being "pristine" and that, therefore, disqualified it for use in the offerings were then listed. They are similar to the blemishes that disqualified a priest from serving at the altar or in the Tabernacle, but they are not identical. The word translated "blind" is well known and easily understood. The word translated "broken" probably means an animal with a broken bone. The word translated "cut" probably means an animal that was disfigured from a cut or gash in the skin. The word translated "running [sore]" definitely refers to something that is running and most likely means a sore. The word translated "itch" is rare. It was one of the blemishes mentioned for the priests, and it is generally understood to mean some kind of itching rash on the skin. The word translated "mange" was also listed for the priests. It refers to some kind of scaly condition on the skin. With reference for the priests, it is translated "psoriasis" in Leviticus 21:20, while in this verse it is translated "mange." At least, it means some kind of scaly illness on the skin. Any of these conditions made the animal undesirable and unfit for use as any kind of fire-offering (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a fire-offering).

Verse 23. A bull or a lamb that is twisted or stunted, you may present as a voluntary gift, but it will not be accepted for a vow.

A difference was made in the regulations concerning an animal that was offered as a slaughter-offering to accompany a voluntary gift from one to accompany a vow. An animal that accompanied a voluntary gift could have a twisted spine or be stunted in its growth. An animal presented with the payment of a vow could not have either of those conditions. A distinction already had been made in the ceremonies for slaughter-offerings that accompanied payment of a vow or a voluntary gift from those that expressed thanksgiving. A slaughter-offering that was offered to accompany payment of a vow or a voluntary gift was not

offered with bread, and they could be eaten over a period of two days. A slaughter-offering that was offered to express thanksgiving was offered with bread and had to be eaten the same day the offering was made (see comments on Lev. 7:15 in MESSAGE 7). In this MESSAGE a means was provided to distinguish a slaughter-offering offered for a vow from one offered for a voluntary gift. The difference was in the condition of the animals that could be offering. The reason why a stricter standard was provided for animals offered with vows may have been to emphasize the importance of not forgetting vows made in advance and of fulfilling promises made to Jehovah. In all other cases, the same standard applied to animals for all the offerings.

Verses 24-25. **24 And ones punctured, crushed, torn, or cut, you must not offer to Jehovah. And you must not do [this] in your land,**

25 And you must not offer any of these from the hand of a foreigner because of the damage in them. A blemish [is] in them; they will not be accepted for you.

These verses mean that animals with damaged testicles were not to be used as offerings to Jehovah. The words probably do not describe four methods of castration but four injuries to the testicles that could make the animal incapable of reproducing. Animals with damaged reproductive organs were not whole and pristine. They could not be used as an altar offering.

“And you must not do [this] in your land” may mean that Israelites were not ever to deliberately make animals incapable of reproducing within their land. More likely it means they were not to use animals they had made incapable of reproducing as altar offerings. “And you must not offer any of these from the hand of a foreigner” means they were not to offer an animal that had been made incapable of reproducing by a foreigner outside the land and that had been brought into the land for sale. How and where an animal was damaged was not the issue. Any damaged animal was not to be offered to Jehovah. If a worshiper did offer a damaged animal, it would not be accepted for him as a legitimate offering.

Application

Animal offerings represented spiritual experiences in the life of the worshipers. An animal with a blemish could not be a fitting symbol of a genuine worship experience. Bringing to the altar a pristine animal showed the sincerity of the Israelite worshiper. Christians must be equally sincere when we worship God. Just going through the ceremony of worship is not pleasing to God. Our hearts must be sincere about experiencing God and yielding ourselves to Him. When we sing, pray, listen, learn, or dedicate ourselves with our hearts, our worship is acceptable. We are blessed and made whole ourselves by sincere and genuine worship and communion with our God.