

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS – LESSON 3

Lesson 3 – The Main Sacrifices of Leviticus

Recall from the Lesson 1 outline how the beginning of Leviticus is structured...

Laws of Sacrifice (1:1 – 7:38)

- a) Instructions for the Laity (1:1 – 5:26)
 - i) The burnt offering (ch 1)
 - ii) The grain offering (aka cereal offering) (ch 2)
 - iii) The peace offering (ch 3)
 - iv) The purification offering (aka sin offering) (4:1 – 5:13)
 - v) The reparation offering (aka trespass or guilt offering) (5:14 – 26)
- b) Instructions for the Priests (6:1 – 7:38)
 - i) The burnt offering (6:1 – 6)
 - ii) The grain offering (6:7 – 11)
 - iii) The priest's cereal offering (6:12 – 16)
 - iv) The purification offering (6:17 – 23)
 - v) The reparation offering (7:1 – 10)
 - vi) The peace offering (7:11 – 36)
 - vii) Summary (7:37 – 38)

- The burnt, grain and peace offerings were called “**Sweet Savor Sacrifices**”. These “smelled good” to God and were pleasing to him. They were offered by Israelites who had no sins **that they knew of** that need to be atoned for.
- The purification (sin) and reparation (trespass or guilt) offerings were offered by Israelites who had **unintentionally** sinned (or became unclean which was a form of sin) against God, later realized their sin and then sought forgiveness for the sin they committed in ignorance. **Lets call these generically “Sin Offerings”**. They were required to repair the broken fellowship with God resulting from sin. As a result, **they did not smell good to God**. Most purification and reparation offerings were not intended for rebellious, intentional or “high handed” sin. We will discuss those in a later lesson.

Note how Exodus ends and Leviticus begins. Leviticus is truly a sequel to Exodus and continues the Exodus narrative without any pause...

Exodus 40:34 - Leviticus 1:2

34 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

36 In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; 37 but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. 38 So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.

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Lev 1:1 The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, 2
“Speak to the Israelites and say to them...”

Exodus 40:36-38 is a parenthetical comment. Lev 1:1 picks up right where Ex 40:35 leaves off. As stated in lesson 1, Leviticus is part of the historical narrative of Israel, how Israel became a nation. They *especially illustrate God’s covenant purpose which was to make them into “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Ex 19:6).

God has the same purpose for his New Covenant people...

1 Peter 2:9

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This is something to REALLY THINK ABOUT as you study the book of Leviticus (and, for that matter, the entire Old Testament). With few exceptions, Israel FAILED to become that the holy nation God intended. Why? They refused to obey God’s covenant law which was given to them to teach them *how* to become a holy people. A Christian or a church can suffer the same fate. (Read Revelation 2 & 3.)

Remember, Israel was given the law in the context of grace. ***Because they were saved*** and chosen by God, they were given the law. They were commanded to obey it in order to learn *how* to become God’s holy people. The same is true for the Christian. We are saved by the blood as Jesus as an act of pure love and grace. As a result of God’s saving grace, we are commanded to learn to live holy lives by imitating Christ, by walking in his footsteps NOT AS A MEANS TO BE SAVED, BUT BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN SAVED.

By refusing to obey God’s law, Israel broke the covenant they made with God. The result of disobedience is unholiness the consequences of which were outlined in the Old Covenant in Lev 26 and Deut 28. They were DIRE consequences. A Church or Disciple who refuses to obey the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2; I Cor 9:21) in order to become God’s holy New Covenant people breaks the covenant he/she made with God with the resulting dire consequences.¹ ***There might not be a more important Christian teaching than this one.*** We will come back to this again...

¹ The Old Testament obliterates the false doctrine of “once saved always saved”. Old or New Testament one is saved by the grace of God and in doing so enters into a covenant (agreement) with God. Our part of the agreement is to live holy, upright lives by making Jesus Lord and following him (especially when we don’t want to). Rebellious, intentional sin breaks the covenant (e.g. the golden calf). Unintentional sin does not (e.g. accidental uncleanness). It is handled within the terms of the covenant by God’s grace. God’s promise in his covenant agreement is to forgive all our sins past, present and future. Our promise to God is to make Jesus Lord and obey the law of Christ. By breaking the covenant ***we cause*** the agreement between God and man to be null and void. God then withdraws from his part of the agreement. This is how one can lose the salvation he/she once enjoyed. See Heb 5:11ff; 10:25ff among other places.

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Sweet Savor Sacrifices

1. Leviticus begins with the three most common sacrifices in the Jewish Law; the Burnt Offering, the Grain Offering and the Peace Offering.
 - a. These sacrifices are described as “an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.”²
 - b. The offerings are arranged from the more valuable to the less valuable

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Burnt Offerings	Grain Offerings	Peace Offerings
3-9 cattle	1-3 uncooked	1-5 cattle
10-13 sheep or goats	4-10 cooked	6-11 sheep
14-17 birds	11-16 miscellaneous	12-17 goats

- c. In general, the more valuable offerings were required for either leaders who sinned (High Priest, priest, judge, etc.) or if the whole community sinned. The wealthier Israelites were often required to offer the more valuable sacrifices as well. Poor Israelites offered the least valuable sacrifices because that is all they could afford but their sacrifices were just as pleasing to God. Sometimes, however, specific sacrifices were required no matter who one was or what one could afford.
- d. The Levitical Law makes it very clear in each sacrifice what roles are carried out by the worshippers and what roles are reserved solely for the priests. The role played by each tells us a great deal about the potential symbolic meaning of the ritual.
- e. Meat was a valuable commodity, a real luxury in OT times. One of the prerequisites of a sacrifice in Leviticus is that ***it had to be costly.***³ It had to be of substantial value to the offerer and it had to be the best he had. It couldn't be lame, sick or spoiled. ***Imagine bringing your special contributions to church. You scratched and skimmed all year and you saved a meaningful amount of money. You knew you could really use that money to pay bills, retire debt, buy a better car, take a vacation, etc. But you decided to honor God instead and give it to him out of thankfulness. Suppose after the collection the minister piles all the cash together and then sets it on fire as a sacrifice to God. How would you feel? To the Israelites, their burnt offerings were a substantial part of their wealth.***

The Burnt Offering

Leviticus 1

1 The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, **2** “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

3 “ **If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the**

² This is the NIV 1984 translation. Other translations “a food offering” (several versions) for the Lord which has “a soothing aroma” (NASB) or “a sweet savor” (ASV), “an odor pleasing to the Lord (Tanakh), etc. According to scholars, both translations are possible with some preferring one over the other or a combination of the two, e.g. “a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (ESV). In our study we will stick with the NIV 1984 translation for consistency.

³ See 2 Sam 2:24

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Lord.4 He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5 He is to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 6 He is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. 7 The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. 9 He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. **It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.**

10 “ **If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock**, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect.11 He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. 12 He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. 13 He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of it and burn it on the altar. **It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.**

14 “ **If the offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds**, he is to offer a dove or a young pigeon. 15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. 16 He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. 17 He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the altar. **It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.**

1) The Animal

- a) As a rule, the animal had to be a perfect male.⁴ One year old male lambs were the most common but for certain festivals bulls or rams were required.
 - i) The most important feature of the Burnt Offering is that the entire animal (except the hide, Lev 7:8 or crop 1:16) was burned on the altar. The Hebrew term for “burnt offering” means “ascending”, meaning ascending to God in smoke and fire.

2) The Ritual

- a) Done by the Worshipper
 - i) The bull was brought by the owner to the entrance to the tent of meeting or, in the case of the lamb or goat, was brought to a place just north of the altar.
 - ii) The worshipper laid his hands on the animal's head and, probably explained the reason for bringing the sacrifice; childbirth, healing, uncleanness (ch 12, 14 15). He may have recited or sung a Psalm (e.g. 40:7; 51:18, 21; 66:13, 15) but the Bible does not say for sure.
 - iii) The worshipper then had to kill the animal himself in such a way as to drain the blood into a receptacle provided by the priests.
 - iv) The animal was then skinned and butchered in a specified way.

⁴ Birds could be male or female.

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- v) The worshipper would take the hind legs and the internal organs and wash them in the large laver of water located between the altar and the Tabernacle. This removed any of the dead animals waste that may have polluted the carcass.
- b) Done by the Priest
 - i) While the worshipper butchered the animal, the priest would splash the blood on the sides of the altar.
 - ii) The priest would take the pieces of the animal (minus the hide) and arrange them on the altar of burnt offering. The priests were allowed to keep the hide presumably to sell, make clothes, tents or various other items.
 - iii) In the case where birds were offered, the priests did nearly everything.
- c) The worshipper, bloodied by the task, would leave the area knowing that God was pleased with his sacrifice and with him.

Only a ritually clean Israelite was allowed to offer a burnt offering. A sinful, unclean Israelite who acted like he was right with God by offering the sacrifices of a Worshipper (burnt, grain, peace) rather than those of a Sinner (purification, reparation) incurred God's wrath.

- d) If done correctly and with a pure heart, the sacrifice would be accepted by God on his behalf and would “make atonement for him.”
- 3) Summary of the Burnt Offering
- a) It was the most common of all sacrifices. The priests offered burnt offerings every morning and every evening. They were offered at every festival. They were offered for various purposes. They were offered by every Israelite.
 - b) Many believe the burnt offering symbolized the full and complete devotion of an Israelite to God. But it was more than that. It also atoned for sin which is obvious by what the Bible says about it and that the worshipper placed his hands on the animal thus symbolically “transferring” his sin and uncleanness to the animal. It also averted God’s wrath from being carried out as seen in many passages.
 - c) Sacrifice in the form of a burnt offering pleases God and, in some way, soothes the Lord by appeasing his anger.
 - i) After God destroyed the world in the Great Flood, Noah offered sacrifices to God (something that God had planned for by bringing in extra animals to sacrifice).
Genesis 8:21
21 The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.
 - ii) One cannot read the Pentateuch without clearly seeing that rebellious man is always in danger of angering the Holy God. Fierce judgment and sudden death often result. Sacrifice appeases God’s anger.⁵

⁵ See 2 Sam 24:25, 1 Chr 21:26, Job 42:8, 2 Chr 29:7-8, etc.

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- d) The burnt offering makes atonement for man.
 - i) This is often deemphasized in commentaries on Leviticus. Many feel that the purification (sin) offering and the reparation (guilt or trespass) offerings are for making atonement and that the burnt offering must be for some other purpose such as symbolizing complete surrender and total consecration to the Lord.
 - ii) But Lev 1:4 is clear that it does make atonement but perhaps in a more general sense. Perhaps the burnt offering atoned for sin that were hidden from the worshipper but not from God. Note what David said...

Psalms 19:12-13

12 Who can discern his errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. (The Burnt Offering?)

13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; (The Purification (sin) or Reparation Offering?) may they not rule over me.

Perhaps the burnt offering forgave sins the worshipper simply could not “discern”. ***It was an acknowledgement that the worshipper had a clear conscience before God while understanding that a clear conscience did not necessarily mean the absence of sin.*** It simply meant the absence of discernable sin.

- iii) The burnt offering does not change man’s sinful nature but it makes fellowship with God possible.
- e) The burnt offering was also offered as an act of thanksgiving for deliverance (Num 6:14; 15:3; Ps 50; 66:13-15).
- 4) The Burnt Offering in the New Testament
 - a) **Explicitly** mentioned in only two places.

Mark 12:33

33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Hebrews 10:5-7

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;

6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

7 Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, O God.’ ”

- b) But implied in **many** other places. For example...

Luke 2:22-24

22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

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Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Hebrews 7:27

27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.⁶

5) The Burnt Offering and the Disciple

- a) The acceptable burnt offering in the OT had to be a Perfect Male animal (usually a lamb). **We can never offer ourselves to God that way because we have sinned.** Once you sin, you can never be perfect in the way Jesus was actually perfect. Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice and served as the perfect burnt offering **in our place**. If we are “in Christ” we join in with him in being offered to God as perfect sacrifices ourselves.⁷
- b) The burnt offering had to be offered twice every day. The spiritually minded Jew would remember every morning and every evening that a lamb was being offered to atone for his sins reminding him that he needed to give his whole heart and life to God. You can perhaps see echos of this in the Disciple’s life in the following passages...

Luke 9:23

23 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

1 Corinthians 15:31

31 I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Grain Offering

Leviticus 2:1-13

1 “**When someone brings a grain offering to the Lord, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it** 2 and take it to Aaron’s sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 3 The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; **it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire.**

4 “**If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of fine flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers made without yeast and spread with oil.** 5 **If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and without yeast.** 6 Crumble it and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. 7 **If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it is to be made of fine flour and oil.** 8 Bring the grain offering made of these things to the Lord; present it to the priest, who shall take it to the altar. 9 He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 10 The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; **it is a most holy part of**

⁶ This verse seems to refer to both burnt offerings and sin offerings.

⁷ We’ll see this very clearly especially in the Passover and Day of Atonement festivals.

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the offerings made to the Lord by fire.

11 “Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the Lord by fire. **12** You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. **13** Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

- 1) The Offering
 - a) Fine flour, wafers (presumably flat), cakes baked in an oven, cakes prepared on a griddle or cooked in a pan.
 - b) It must not contain yeast or honey.
 - c) It must have oil in it or poured on it.
 - d) It must have salt added to it.
- 2) The Ritual
 - a) Done by the Worshipper
 - i) The worshipper was to bring either raw flour or cakes of bread cooked in a specific way. He was to make sure oil and salt were added and bring with it a handful of incense.
 - ii) He was to give it to the priests.
 - b) Done by the Priest
 - i) The priest took a “memorial portion” meaning a large handful of the flour or cakes, added all the incense to it and then offered that portion on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord.
 - ii) The priests were allowed to keep the remaining portion of the grain offerings for themselves.⁸
 - c) The Meaning of the Grain Offering
 - i) The Hebrew word for grain or cereal is minhah. In nonreligious usage it means “tribute” in the sense that a vassal king might pay tribute to a more powerful king in order to show his good faith, his respect. It was a humble acknowledgement of another’s superior power. For example...

2 Samuel 8:5-6

5 When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them. **6** He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

Israel was in a covenant relationship with an immensely powerful God. It made perfect sense that they acknowledge God’s sovereignty over them.

⁸ The Levites, who included the priests, (descendants of Aaron) had no physical land inheritance from God when they came into the Promise Land. God himself was their inheritance. The other tribes were required to support the Levites and Priests by their tithes and offerings. In general, the Levites were supported by the tithes brought in by their fellow Israelites. The priests, on the other hand, were supported by the sacrificial offerings brought to the Tabernacle. When Israel was faithful and brought in their tithes and offerings, which included the firstborn of all their flocks and herds, the Levites and priests prospered. When they neglected their tithes and offerings, the Levites and priests suffered. This is borne out in the rest of the OT.

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- ii) The grain offering was often offered in conjunction with other sacrifices, especially the burnt offering.
- iii) The prohibition of yeast and honey are not explained in the Bible. Yeast was often symbolic of sin, especially hypocrisy (Matt 16:5ff) so that is possible. Yeast was forbidden in the Passover because it symbolized the haste in which the Israelites left Egypt. Honey is a mystery.
- iv) Salt is a requirement for all grain offerings. Here the symbolism may be ascertainable. In Lev 2:13 he calls it the “salt of the covenant of your God...” Salt probably symbolized the covenant relationship with God. Num 18:19 calls it an “everlasting covenant of salt”. See also 2 Chr 13:5.
- v) Many commentators that I’ve read believe the grain offering symbolized an Israelite’s dedication of his work and/or possessions to God. If this is true, then the application for the Christian would be that all he/she owns should be dedicated to the Lord. Nothing we own belongs to us because it was given to us by the gracious hand of our generous God. We are merely stewards of his possessions. For materialistic westerners, this is especially important to remember.