

Leviticus 1 • Burnt Offerings

Introduction

Although most of us understand the broad parallel between Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the general Old Testament principle of sacrifice, we often skip quickly over the details of Scripture that show even more parallels to our current walk with Christ. The object here is not to just read the details of each sacrifice or even make a comparison chart of how each one was carried out, but to understand the spiritual meaning each holds and the greater teaching of God behind them. In fact, firmly grasping the underlying spiritual truths will enlighten us further not just about the work and death of Christ on the cross, but of the sacrifices that came **BEFORE** the era of Moses as carried out by such well-known biblical figures as Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, et al. It will also deepen our understanding of these things as they're taught in the New Testament and we'll see that they're not at all about animals or rituals, but man's relationship with God.

¹Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ²“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What is different about where God and Moses are talking now versus when the Ten Commandments were given? What might it reveal about the difference behind the two messages?

A: God called Moses to the top of His Mount in lightning and thick clouds to issue the Law. Here God has called Moses out of the Tabernacle at the foot of the Mount to give them the laws regulating their worship. It's a teaching about the application of the Law in real, everyday life, an assurance of knowing how to please God. It shows that what was given in God's glory on the top of the Mount is achievable in real life in the valley below.

Q: Obviously we can deduce by the fact that “Levi” is the tribe of the priests, and is also the first four letters of “Leviticus”, that this book must have special meaning for the priesthood. But how do we know that this is actually a book for the people?

A: God tells Moses, “Speak to the sons of Israel”. God does not designate this as information for the priesthood alone but makes **everyone** in Israel personally responsible.

Q: What kind of offerings are these?

A: These are burnt offerings.

Point: There are 4 general classes of offerings: (1) burnt offerings, (2) meat offerings, (3) peace offerings, and (4) the sin offering that meet various needs from personal all the way to the whole nation.

Q: What are some of the ways that this offering is different from other kinds of offerings?

A: Some offerings are required to be undertaken exclusively by the priesthood on behalf of the nation, others are required as part of personal reconciliation to God. These are strictly and personally voluntary.

Point: God's requirements begin with a willing and voluntary heart that **SEEKS** Him.

Q: To what might we equate “animals from the herd or the flock” in today's world?

A: Personal possessions.

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Point: The most common notion regarding animal sacrifices in a general, religious context is that something is being offered up to appease a god or to meet that god's demands. Since the purpose of biblical offerings to the One True God are meant to reconcile man to God and therefore engender a personal, meaningful, and loving relationship, they have to proceed from free will. They're not about appeasement but relationship.

Q: Why do you suppose that the offering was limited to "animals from the herd or flock"? Why couldn't it be any animal?

A: Only "clean" animals as designated by God's Law could be offered, and of the clean deemed acceptable for sacrifice it was narrowed down to those that most represented the Messiah.

³If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. ⁴He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. ⁵He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁶He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. ⁷The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. ⁸Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. ⁹Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.

[Read v.3-9]

Q: How do we know that these are not the mandatory offerings of the priesthood on behalf of the nation or others?

A: It is brought and presented at the entrance of the Tabernacle by the individual, not carried out as part of the priesthood's routine duties. Take note that it's not actually a priest that slays the offering but the individual bringing it.

Q: What are the indications in v.3 that this represents the work of the Messiah?

1. "...he shall offer it, a male..." It was not a female, pointing to the Messiah's gender and the fact that God's **Son** would be given.
2. "...without defect..." Perfect, having not the least stain or blemish of sin upon Him so that He could offer up Himself without spot to God.
3. "...he shall offer it..." Not forced or compelled, but as a pure, freewill offering. It was given in the same manner Christ laid down His life, obedient even to death.
4. "...at the doorway of the tent of meeting...before the LORD" It was to be accomplished openly and publicly and in the presence of the Lord to Whom it was offered, in the same manner as Christ's crucifixion and death.

Q: What are the similarities to the work of the Messiah in v.4?

A: The laying of the hands on the offering's head signified the transferring of one's sins to the sacrifice, which was to be offered to make atonement. It speaks of the need for our sins to be taken and imputed on a substitute offered in our place.

Point: Jewish sources citing how this practice was carried out testify that at the same time the hands were laid on the head of the offering that confession of sin was made so that the one offering the sacrifice affirmed his sin, acknowledged that he deserved to die as the animal was about to do, and that he expected through this death a pardon for that sin.

Q: Why is the blood of a sacrifice always treated differently than the flesh?

A: Blood represents life and as a part of any sacrifice represents that one life was given in place of another's that he might live. This is called "atonement".

And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22

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*For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
Hebrews 9:13-14*

Q: How might v.6-9 further symbolize the sacrifice of Christ?

1. Skinning the animal may symbolize the sufferings – beatings, scourging, crown of thorns, etc. – of Christ as part of the overall crucifixion process. (v.6)
2. The various parts cut up may symbolize Christ's sufferings in every part of His body from head to foot. (v.6)
3. The fire of the altar may represent the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men which Christ endured when He bore our sins, becoming a whole, burnt offering for us. (v.7)
4. The arranging of the wood on the fire may symbolize the laying of Christ on the cross. (v.8)
5. The washing of the innards and legs may symbolize the internal purity of Christ's heart and the external holiness of His life. At the time of this practice the washing of the innards was recognized to represent the washing away of lusts – harmful behavioral choices – and the washing of the feet signified that one should no more walk an earthly path but heavenly. (v.9)

Q: Aside from personal atonement, what is the ultimate result sought according to v.9?

A: "...an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD."

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
Ephesians 5:1-2*

¹⁰But if his offering is from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect. ¹¹He shall slay it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. ¹²He shall then cut it into its pieces with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. ¹³The entrails, however, and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.

[Read v.10-13]

Q: How are these animals similar to those previously mentioned?

A: They all represent the Messiah. The lamb "*unblemished and spotless*" (1 Peter 1:19) is a well-known type of Christ, particularly as represented in the Passover lamb, as well as by the goats for atonement (Leviticus 16).

¹⁴But if his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering from the turtledoves or from young pigeons. ¹⁵The priest shall bring it to the altar, and wring off its head and offer it up in smoke on the altar; and its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar. ¹⁶He shall also take away its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar eastward, to the place of the ashes. ¹⁷Then he shall tear it by its wings, but shall not sever it. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the wood which is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.

[Read v.14-17]

Q: What was the main reason for allowing these birds as an alternative to the previous, much larger animals?

A: They were provided for the poor, those with little or no significant means.

Q: How does this help explain the true teaching and intent of these sacrifices? Are they really just about the animals and how to sacrifice them?

A: It helps illuminate God's intention to allow **ANYONE** so inclined to voluntarily come to Him regardless of their financial or social or earthly status. It also reinforces the biblical principle that we are each responsible according to what we are given, whether great or small.

Q: How might the manner of this sacrifice represent the sacrifice of Christ?

1. Such birds symbolized innocence.
2. The Messiah's death was to be violent, with the laying on of violent hands.
3. The tearing short of severing may symbolize that although death separated body and soul, yet Christ's human nature was not separated from His divine Person, nor was He divided in His union with God the Father.

Overall Application

Given the above discussion, share your personal application of the following verse. What are the lessons learned from Leviticus 1 that should apply to us today?

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:1