

Studies in Leviticus

The Burnt Offering (Leviticus 1:1-17)

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Background

Introduction

For us to truly understand the significance of the New Testament we must first have a strong understanding and appreciation of the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament; both Testaments stand complete together. Jesus Himself built upon and fulfilled the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures. He often quoted directly¹ and indirectly² from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Leviticus is the third book of the Pentateuch. In Jewish usage it is referred to as ‘wayyiqra’, which literally means ‘and He called’. It is with this word that the book of Leviticus begins. A constant theme throughout the book is the holiness of God – the word for “holy” appears more than eighty times in the book.

Without the message of Leviticus the key event of all time, the death of Jesus Christ, is an enigma. Here the ritual and the rules were never simply an end to themselves; instead we begin to see a picture of God’s holiness, love and grace and we begin to explore one aspect of atonement. As we begin a series of studies in Leviticus, it is our hope and prayer that you will be richly blessed as this picture begins to become clear, and that you might be inspired to delve deeper for yourselves.

Leviticus is also significant since it provides us with a background to all the other books of the Bible. If we wish to understand references to sacrificial offerings and ceremonies of purification, or institutions such as the sabbatical year or the year of jubilee, it is this book that we must consult.

The book also proclaims to us who are Christians the way in which the God of Israel combats sin in Israel. He combats it by means of His institutions of sacrifice and purification - social sin by means of the sabbatical year and year of jubilee, sexual sins by means of the laws of chastity - and also by means of His promises and warnings. It is in this combating of sin that the book of Leviticus presents to us Christ as the means of atonement, the means of purification, the great Priest, Prophet and Teacher, the King who rules us through His ordinances. This is the abiding significance of Leviticus. It is the book of sanctification, of the consecration of life (the burnt offering stands in the forefront of the book), of the avoidance and atonement of sin, the combating and removal of sin among the people of the Lord. The Day of Atonement occupies a central place in it³; the ceremony of the two goats prescribed for that day reminds us that “as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.”⁴

According to Wilkinson and Boa, “the burnt offering typifies Christ’s total offering in submission to His Father’s will. The meal offering typifies Christ’s sinless service. The peace offering is a type of the fellowship believers have with God through the work of the Cross. The sin offering typifies Christ as our guilt-bearer. The trespass offering typifies Christ’s payment for the damage of sin.”⁵

¹ Compare for example Matthew 26:31 to Zechariah 13:7

² Compare for example Matthew 19:4-6 to Genesis 1:27, 5:2, 2:24

³ Leviticus 16

⁴ Psalm 103:12

⁵ Wilkinson, B., & Boa, K. (1983), *Talk thru the Bible*, p.22, Nashville: T. Nelson.

Sacrifice and Offering

The first five chapters of Leviticus deal in turn with the burnt-offering⁶ (*'ôlâ*), cereal-offering⁷ (*minhâ*), peace-offering⁸ (*zebah*), sin-offering⁹ (*hattât*) and guilt-offering¹⁰ (*'ăšām*). These offerings, as we shall see, fall into any of three categories in that they are offerings of dedication, thanksgiving or expiation. Chapters 6 and 7 give additional regulations for all five:

- a) **Burnt** (dedication)¹¹
- b) **Cereal or Grain** (dedication)¹²
- c) **Peace or Fellowship** (thanksgiving)¹³
- d) **Sin** (expiation)¹⁴
- e) **Guilt, Repayment or Trespass** (expiation)¹⁵

The order in which these five are revealed here is not that in which Israel presented them, but in their actual use the Sin and Guilt (Repayment) offerings came first. Then in the consciousness that sin was put away and pardon secured through those offerings, the Burnt and Cereal (Grain or Meal) offerings followed, by which the desire of the people to devote themselves to God wholly for His service was expressed. Lastly, in the peace of a cleansed conscience and a surrendered life the Peace (Fellowship) offering was presented, expressing thanksgiving, fellowship and communion with God. See 2 Chronicles 29: 21-31 for an illustration of the order in which the offerings were presented.

In this, the first of our studies in Leviticus, we will be taking a look at the Burnt Offering. We have included a table at the end of the study that provides you with a clear guide and summary of the different types of sacrifice and offering found in Leviticus, with related references.

The Message

Features of the Burnt Offering

Seven features constituted the ritual of the Burnt offering, as follows:

1. The presentation, v.3.
2. The laying on of hands, v.4.
3. The slaying of the victim, v.5.
4. The sprinkling of the blood, v.5.
5. The separating of the pieces, v.6.
6. The washing of the pieces, v.9.
7. The burning of the whole, v.9.

The burnt offering had to fulfil certain criteria (presupposing a sanctuary, an altar, and an officiating priesthood), which included:

⁶ Leviticus 1:1-17

⁷ Leviticus 2:1-16

⁸ Leviticus 3:1-17

⁹ Leviticus 4:1-35 – Leviticus 5:1-13

¹⁰ Leviticus 5:14 – 6:7

¹¹ Leviticus 6:8-13, Leviticus 8:18-21, Leviticus 16:24

¹² Leviticus 6:14-23

¹³ Leviticus 7:11-34

¹⁴ Leviticus 6:24-30, Leviticus 8:14-17, Leviticus 16:3-22

¹⁵ Leviticus 7: 1-10

- i. It had to be male.
- ii. It had to be perfect (without blemish).
- iii. It could be out of the herd, out of the flock, out of the fowls.
- iv. After slaughter, the blood had to be sprinkled all around the altar.
- v. It had to be ceremonially washed; the inward parts and legs.
- vi. The sacrifice had to be classed as clean (see also Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14).
- vii. The whole animal was burnt; the only sacrifice to be totally consumed (with the exception of the skin¹⁶) on the altar.
- viii. None of it was consumed by either the offerer or the priest.
- ix. The offering could only be presented at the door of the Tabernacle¹⁷.

The Hebrew name for this sacrifice conveys the idea of 'going up' or 'that which ascends', and the phrase '*of pleasing odour to the Lord*' is common. The burnt offering symbolized the worshipper's homage and total dedication to God; total and absolute surrender. In laying their hand on the animal the worshipper identified them self completely with the sacrifice – some type of representation or substitution. The offering also had to cost him something, and was the most common of all the sacrifices.

We can see from verse 3 that we are not to approach the Lord to bring sacrifice unless it is something that we want to do in our hearts¹⁸.

Note how sacrifice can be a corporate event as well as individual; the sons of Israel actually killed the sacrifice¹⁹ and the priest fulfilled the rest of the sacrificial functions - the sons of Aaron.

The burning of the whole is important, since it signifies the ascending of the offering in consecration to God, and His acceptance of it (9:24).

Other Information

The sacrificial system was clearly open to abuse, and on more than one occasion was criticised by the prophets²⁰. A number of other texts stress the fact that obedience counts for more than sacrifice²¹. It was only too easy to assume God's acceptance of the offering and neglect the moral obligation to obey Him. People who lived in this way made sin a purely external thing in the hope of minimizing its seriousness.

The teaching that Moses brought the Israelites from God taught them that complete consecration to God is essential to right worship. We know from the New Testament that Christ represented us in perfect consecration and surrender²². He died that we might not die, but it does not follow that since He was consecrated for us we need not be consecrated ourselves²³.

¹⁶ See Leviticus 7:8

¹⁷ See Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10

¹⁸ See also Malachi 1:6-14, Micah 6:6-8, Hosea 5:6

¹⁹ Compare Leviticus 16:21; Numbers 8-11

²⁰ Amos 5:25; Isaiah 1:11-12; Jeremiah 7:22

²¹ 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Psalm 40:6-8

²² John 17:19; Romans 5:19; Hebrews 10:5-10

²³ Romans 12:1

Old Testament Sacrifices

Name	OT References	Elements	Purpose
Burnt Offering	Leviticus 1, 6:8-13, 8:18-21, 16:24	Bull, ram or male bird (dove or young pigeon for poor); wholly consumed; no defect	Voluntary act of worship; atonement for unintentional sin in general; expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God
Cereal or Grain Offering	Leviticus 2; 6:14-23	Grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, baked bread (cakes or wafers), salt; no yeast or honey; accompanied burnt offering and fellowship offering (along with drink offering)	Voluntary act of worship; recognition of God's goodness and provision; devotion to God
Fellowship or Peace Offering	Leviticus 3, 7:11-34	Any animal without defect from herd or flock variety of breads	Voluntary act of worship; thanksgiving and fellowship (it included a communal meal)
Sin Offering	Leviticus 4:1-5, 4:13, 6:24-30, 8:14-17, 16:3-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young bull: for high priest and congregation 2. Male goat : for leader 3. Female goat or lamb: common person 4. Dove or pigeon: for the poor 5. Tenth of an ephah of fine flour: for the very poor 	Mandatory atonement for specific unintentional sin; confession of sin; forgiveness of sin; cleansing from defilement
Guilt, Repayment or Trespass Offering	Leviticus 5:14 to 6:7, 7:1-6	Ram or lamb	Mandatory atonement for unintentional sin requiring restitution; cleansing from defilement; make restitution; pay 20% fine

Source: *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (1987), p.150, London, Hodder & Stoughton