

THE BURNT OFFERING (Lev. 1)

The Book of Leviticus is one of those often-neglected books of the Bible. The problem is, - some claim, - it is so 'dry'. ... 'They' ask, what relevance do all those offerings and sacrifices have for me today? ... Well, if the Lord had not meant it for us, He would not have included it in the Bible! Therefore, it is *there for our good* and it is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (II Tim. 3:16). It is actually one of the most important books in the Old Testament for it was the bedrock of God's relationship with His people. In the offerings and the sacrifices God instructed the Jews in the principles of holiness and the atonement. This was God's manual for how His people in the Old Testament were to approach Him. Indeed, upon these same principles much of the New Testament have their foundation for the Old Testament offerings and sacrifices foreshadowed the Person and work of Christ.

The background to the book of Leviticus is the wilderness of Sinai, about the year 1445 BC, following the Hebrew exodus from Egypt. At first, they had no formal place to worship and no regulated set of sacrifices and feasts. They had no high priest or formal priesthood. Shortly after the Hebrews left Egypt though, as they began journeying in the desert, *Ex. 25:1 the LORD spake unto Moses [... Moses the friend of God, Ex. 33:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend ... and the mediator between God and His people], saying, ² Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering ... ⁸ And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. ⁹ According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.* This was to be God's dwelling-place among His people. Later, when the tabernacle was completed it was from the Holy of Holies God commanded Moses concerning the burnt offering, *Lev. 1:1 And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, ² Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.*

The children of Israel are about to be given instruction on how to approach God, and their offerings on the altar were to satisfy His requirement for their sin to be atoned. There were five *main* offerings, - the burnt offering, the meat offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering.

They were the only nation with whom God had this special relationship, *Dt. 7:6 For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. ⁷ The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more*

in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: ⁸ But because the LORD loved you. With this great privilege, however, came great responsibility for they were to give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29:2). ... Worship was on God's terms, - it wasn't according to how the priests thought the people should be engaged. Neither was it to be the same as how the pagan gods were worshipped. Worship is the highest form of praise and God determined how His people should approach Him.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us we must *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Heb. 12:28), ... The word for 'serve' (λατρεύω) is a technical word relating to priestly religious service, - it specifically refers to worship. It means to render unto God true adoration and devotion ... not light-hearted or vain. God is holy. He is just and perfect. He is powerful. He is eminently more majestic than any earthly monarch. We are sinners saved by grace coming before a holy God on the merits of His Son and our Redeemer. We come from out of a fallen world, where its stains leave their mark, and we come into the presence of the Holy of holies.

The Lord Jesus said, **Jn. 4:24** *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* ... Worship doesn't need music. Worship doesn't require large crowds. It doesn't depend upon anything earthly ... true worship is Holy Spirit given. It emanates from God and it is the highest purpose for His creation ... He created us to worship Him, and the principles contained in the book of Leviticus illustrate His conditions, as the writer to the Hebrews explained, without holiness, no man can see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

It is only by the grace of God we are privileged to worship Him. ... When the children of Israel made an encampment in the wilderness the tabernacle was constructed strictly upon the dimensions specified by God. The outer court of the tabernacle area was approximately seventy-five feet wide and one hundred and fifty feet long. The area was entered by the gate which always faced east, - the only way in and the only way out, - ... and at the very back of the tabernacle area was a structure fifteen feet by forty-five feet which contained the Ark of the Covenant.

When you walked through the gate, the Altar of Burnt Offering was immediately in front of you, and on past it was the Laver which was a large basin of water for the ceremonial washing carried out by the priests. Beyond the Laver was the enclosed area known as the Holy Place. When you entered the Holy Place, on the right-hand side was the Table of Shewbread, and on the left

was the Menorah ... and in front was the Altar of Incense. Directly behind the Altar of Incense was the Veil, which was the entrance into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This was where the earthly presence of God dwelt.

Every male adult Jew would come in through the gate with his offering, **Lev. 1:3** *If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.* He would approach reverently, carefully, and sincerely. He would be focussed on what he was doing and why he was doing it. He would bring a bullock from his herd if he could afford it. If he couldn't, he would bring a sheep or a goat. Some could not even afford that and they were allowed to bring a turtledove or a pigeon. Whatever animal they brought, it had to be a male, without blemish, spotless, without defect.

The worshipper bringing his offering of the bullock would stand at the door of the tabernacle, looking towards the altar of burnt offering, - that was where he would make atonement for his sin. The altar of burnt offering was what he would see first, and it is at the gate the priest would have met him. The priest then led him with his offering from the gate to the altar, and the priest accepted him by virtue of his offering. The worshipper would then, - watched by the priest, - put his hand on the head (Lev. 1:4) of the animal, pressing his fingers [*Hebrew, he shall 'lean' his hand ... it is the same word in Ps. 88:7, Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves*] ... and by faith he transferred his sins to the sacrifice, - he is identifying himself with the offering,

O sacred head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down.

The animal was about to die in his place, and then he himself would slaughter it in the presence of the Lord, and before the priest (v.5), and the blood would flow. The man who brought the animal knew for his sin to be covered the blood had to be shed ... atonement required to be made. The priest immediately gathered the blood in one of the bowls, - none of the blood was wasted. In the blood was the life of the animal sacrificed ... and it was brought before God. It was as if the living soul of the sinner was being carried in its helplessness and filthiness, to be presented before the Lord. Then the priest sprinkled the blood round about the altar to atone for the sins of the offerer (v.5).

After the blood had been applied the worshipper skinned the animal, **6 And he shall flay [strip] the burnt offering,** - the sacrifice was completely uncovered, and

its insides became visible ... nothing hidden. The bare animal was then cut into pieces, - ... first the head, then the fat, then the inwards, and finally the legs. It took time. It took concentration. It required commitment to worship God ... Every part of the sacrifice was mangled, bruised, and distorted. It lay on the altar powerless, helpless, and defenceless. Every member of its body was torn apart ... limb from limb, sinew from sinew, broken and marred.

When that was done, each of the individual pieces was placed in order upon the fire of the altar ... the fire symbolising the righteous and holy wrath of God upon the sinner's sacrifice ... and as the body parts burned, the smoke ascended heavenward as a sweet-smelling savour. ... **8 And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar ...** The head symbolises the outward, and the fat symbolises the inward. Then the priests took the 'inwards' (intestines) and the legs of the animal and they wash them in water. These also were burnt on the altar. Everything was to be done decently and in order.

Finally, there was nothing left but the skin ... The skin was the only part of the animal not burnt on the altar ... but it was not wasted, **Lev. 7:8 And the priest that offereth any man's burnt offering, even the priest shall have to himself the skin of the burnt offering which he hath offered.** The skin was saved to make garments for the priest and the people. They were clothed in the sacrifice which had been acceptable to God. ... Remember the first killing in Scripture. It was after Adam and Eve had sinned and they were being cast out of the Garden of Eden but before they left, **Gen. 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.** ... The Lord provided their covering.

The remainder of chapter one relates to how the sheep and the goats were to be sacrificed (v.10-13), and the turtledoves and young pigeons (v.14-17). Even in the offerings, God made provision for *all* His people, and in the same way, in Christ He has made every provision for the Jew and the Gentile, the bond and the free. It doesn't matter who you are, where you have come from, or what you have or haven't, God made the perfect provision for you through His Sacrifice, His Son ... and our great High Priest welcomes all who come. ... Look closer and you'll see this being developed ... Notice how the sacrifice of the bullock was made at the *east* of the tabernacle area (v.3 **at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD**) ... and the sacrifice of the sheep and the goats was made to the *north* of the altar (Lev. 1:11). ... The north and the east, - this was looking ahead to our Saviour, for ...

In Christ there is no east or west,

In Him no south or north.

... **Jn. 3:16** God so loved the world [*north, south, east, and west ... and everything in between*], that he gave his only begotten Son, ... and the invitation is to ‘all the ends of the earth’, **Is. 45:22** Look unto me, and be ye saved, *all the ends of the earth*. Around the throne in Heaven stand the Redeemed from out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 5:9)

What an offering then was this burnt offering! With the exception of the skin which became a covering, each of the unblemished pieces were presented to God and burnt on the altar, after which the incense ascended ... an offering acceptable unto God for sinners.

The burnt offering speaks of our Saviour and every part of Him was affected when He became our Sacrifice, **Is. 52:14** his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men ... **Is. 53:2** he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... ⁴ ... he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ... ⁵ ... he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him ... ⁶ ... and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

How marvellous! How wonderful!

Is my Saviour's love for me!