



## **LEVITICUS 1-7 THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM AND ITS MEANING FOR US TODAY**

We begin with Leviticus, the third book in the Bible, but remember, it is a *continuation* of the previous two books. The first five books in the Bible, called the Torah, are actually one work in five volumes. So there is great continuity in all of this and mostly written by the same author, Moses.

It has been about a year since Israel left Egypt and the Tabernacle is completed on the first day of the second year (Exodus 40:17). On that memorable day, the shining cloud representing God's presence entered the Holy of Holies and began to dwell with Israel. Of course, there would be many times, due to disobedience, that God would have to distance Himself from man, but at the end of His glorious Plan of Salvation, God the Father and Jesus Christ's presence will be *permanent* with Their glorified children. Notice: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people...the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple...And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him'" (Rev. 20:3, 22; 21:3).

So the Tabernacle is ready, the priests are prepared, and now their roles will be defined. The chief role of the priests is to represent the people of Israel before God. This was necessary because of the sinful nature of the Israelites, who did not have God's spirit in them. The sacrifices and the Levitical system would be a *temporary* setup until a better system, based upon better promises—that of Christ being the High Priest and the Holy Spirit being accessible to converted people.

The Bible explains, "Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary...It was *symbolic* for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances *imposed until the time of reformation*" (Hebrews 9:1-10). So the priestly functions served to remind Israel of their continual sins and to make a physical reconciliation with God.

This sacrificial system also serves as an indication of the *common origin* of mankind after

they were expelled from Eden, and of this actual society that has its origin after the biblical Flood.

Unger explains, "Archaeology and history have demonstrated the *universality* of sacrifice in human religions from earliest times. Hebrew sacrifices showed both *likeness* and *significant differences* to the sacrificial ritual of the Canaanites, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks and Arabs. Sufficient similarity existed to demonstrate a *common origin* in a God-given revelation to the human race just after the Fall. This original source was corrupted and perverted as mankind lapsed more and more into paganism, and was reflected in the systems of sacrifice prevailing among the polytheistic neighbors of Israel" (*Bible Handbook*, p. 107).

Now, just as the priestly garments were symbolic of Christ's future ministry, so these sacrifices also represent *different facets* of Christ's sacrifice and the *spiritual offerings* given by members of the Church.

There are *five categories* of sacrifices explained in Leviticus that we should carefully examine. Their spiritual meaning is explained in the *New Testament*. This is why the Jewish people, by rejecting Jesus Christ and the New Testament, can't understand the spiritual meaning of the sacrifices.

The five categories are carefully ordered, the first three are pleasing to God and do not deal with sin. The last two deal with sin and are not "a sweet aroma" to God. Remember, *all* of the sacrifices are symbolic of Jesus Christ and the Church's offerings.

### **The first three offerings – the burnt offering, the grain offering and the peace offering**

The first three offerings are very similar and are done, "When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock...It is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord" (Leviticus 1:2-17). The word "atonement" in vs. 4, means "satisfaction" and does not deal with sin, rather a voluntary offering.

There were three classes of animals that could be used—of the herd, such as a bull, of the flocks, such as a sheep or a goat, and of clean birds. This all depended upon the *economic* condition of the person: "If he is *not* able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring to the Lord...two turtledoves or two

young pigeons...But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then...he shall bring one tenth of an ephah of fine flour” (Leviticus 5:7, 11). This principle is applicable to us when we bring our offerings to God, all done “according to the blessing of the Lord your God” (Deut. 16:16). Remember the principle “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

The chief difference between the burnt, grain, and peace offerings consists of the first being *completely* consumed, the second was *partly* burnt, with the priests eating the rest of it, and the third, one part was burnt, one part given to the priests, and a part was given to the person doing the offering.

This is important due to the spiritual meaning of these sacrifices given in the New Testament. Concerning the burnt offering, it was wholly given to God. It represents *a total giving of oneself in service to God*. Jesus was the perfect example of this. He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work...For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 4:34; 6:38). This, incidentally, shows Jesus Christ existed *before* coming down to this earth, and that *before* that time He had a *separate will* from the one who became God the Father.

Remember, this **first** offering was totally voluntary and not dealing with sin. Christ did not offer Himself partially to God, but completely. Paul describes this tremendous offering to us: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being *in the form of God*, did not consider it robbery to be *equal* with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

This total offering was indeed “a sweet aroma to God.” Christ’s whole life was like that, as God the Father said, “You are My beloved Son: in You I am *well pleased*” (Luke 3:22). We should imitate that same dedication of Christ, although it will be always be in an imperfect way. Ephesians 5:2 mentions, “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for *a sweet-smelling aroma*.”

This is the true meaning of the First Commandment, “And you shall love the Lord your God with *all your heart*, with *all your soul*, with *all your mind*, and with *all your strength*. This is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30). Once fully committed to God through baptism, we should present ourselves as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). We are “being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up *spiritual sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Even in the Old Testament, God wanted the Israelites to understand that sacrifice had to be with a true heart. As Micah mentions: “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be please with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, Oh man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8). This is the true meaning of the first sacrifice—a voluntary and total giving of *ourselves* to God.

The **second** sacrifice, the grain offering, was different because it not totally consumed but shared by God and the priests. This symbolizes not the offering of oneself to God but *our fruits or actions* toward God. Our fruits or works of the Spirit are a sweet aroma before God and Christ. Paul explains, “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the *fruit* that abounds to your account...I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a *sweet-smelling aroma*, and *acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God*” (Philippians 4:17-18).

The **third** type of offering--the peace offering--was shared among God, the priests and the giver (Lev. 3; 7:11-20). This symbolizes having a *relationship* of peace with God and Christ. Paul says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Furthermore, Paul mentions our prayers, which are a communion with God and Christ, bring peace to us. He says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be

made known to God, and *the peace of God*, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

When we pray with love and gratitude, it’s like giving God a peace offering. “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the *sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15).

The fourth and the fifth types of sacrifices are completely different from the first three. They were not “a sweet aroma” nor to offer to God one’s life of service, or the fruits produced through the Spirit, or of communion and peace. They were to ask forgiveness for sins and transgressions.

The **fourth** sacrifice was a *sin offering* due to breaking one of God’s commandments (Lev. 4:2-35). The meat offered was not to be sacrificed at the holy altar, but *outside the camp*, on the ground. It was something “unclean” because it represented sin. This offering recognizing our sinful nature and was to be completely burned, purging us of it.

Jesus Christ took upon Himself this fourth sacrifice. John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Yes, He voluntarily took our sins upon Himself. 2 Cor. 5:21 explains, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Jesus Christ fulfilled this sacrifice. We read in Hebrews 13:11-12, “For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”

The **fifth** sacrifice was the *trespass offering* for having committed some serious fault against someone else (Lev. 6:1-7). In this case, the guilty party should present a ram without blemish and “shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs” (Lev. 6:5). This type of sin was not so much because of our sinful nature as due to our actions toward someone else.

To summarize, these sacrificial laws are said to have “a shadow of the *good things* to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (Hebrews 10:1).

These sacrifices clearly pointed to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice, and are part of the temporary aspects of the law that Paul explains: “What purpose then does the law serve? It was *added* because of transgressions, *till the Seed should come* to whom the promise was made” (Galatians 4:19).

Let’s go over the practical and spiritual applications of all five sacrifices. These can be included in our prayers. The first one, the burnt offering, is a way we recognize our *total dedication* to God. When we pray about the category, “Our Father...Thy kingdom come,” we are recognizing we belong to Him, He is our King and we already are citizens of His kingdom.

The second type of sacrifice, the grain offering, we are saying in effect, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Our fruits or actions are directed toward doing God’s will.

In the third sacrifice, the peace offering, we are communicating to God our desire to be at peace with Him. We can then ask with confidence to “give us our daily bread.”

The fourth sacrifice, the sin offering, fits the next category “forgive us our sins...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

The fifth sacrifice reminds us of the sins or faults we do to others, and to forgive the trespasses of others toward us.

Also remember that in the Millennium, these five types of sacrifices will again be instituted (Ezekiel 43-46). The difference will be that they will point the people back to Christ’s sacrifice. Nations will have to learn the deep spiritual meaning of these sacrifices as they learn the rudimentary doctrines of Christ. We ourselves are still reminded yearly of what that sacrifice means to us. That is why every year we celebrate the Passover ceremony of Christ’s sacrifice. As Christ said, “This is My body which is given for you; do this *in remembrance of Me*” (Luke 22:19).