

Offerings and Sacrifices in the Bible



by David Tavender

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Studying the offerings and sacrifices in Scripture is a wonderful and rewarding exercise, but it is not always easy. In one respect, the subject is simple, and yet there are numerous factors contributing to its complexity. Such a study explores the most basic building blocks of life, whilst also considering more intricate nuances regarding faith.

Essentially, people of Bible times presented offerings of food and livestock as part of their worship of God. Various, they were hoping to approach God, have their sins forgiven, be accepted by Him, have a right relationship with Him, express devotion to Him and seek requests from Him.

In this book, we will explore Scripture passages concerning rituals such as animal sacrifices and other ceremonies. We will also explore some of the fundamental principles behind such rituals because, even though Christians are not required to practise them, many of those principles still apply today. It is at this point some readers may wish to immediately commence discussing lessons and applications of these things, skipping past the detailed regulations before considering what they meant to the original worshippers. In my opinion, many modern-day articles and treatises dealing with sacrifices suffer from this kind of well-intended impatience. There is often a desire to apply principles behind the sacrifices to Christ and the Christian experience, without first understanding what they meant to the faithful of Old Testament times, which can lead to flawed applications and some significant shortcomings in understanding when it comes to reading some portions of the Bible mentioning sacrificial offerings. Yet, if we take the time to explore what the ancient sacrifices meant to the people who originally offered them, I believe we will have a greater comprehension of what Christ achieved, and make *better* applications to the Christian life as a result.

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When Paul reminded Timothy that “all Scripture is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16), he largely had the Old Testament in mind. If we study this subject in the order it is revealed in the Bible - starting at the beginning and working our way through - I think we, too, shall find this “profitable”.

With these thoughts in mind, let us now begin to study this subject in detail.

Chapter 2: Defining “Offerings” and “Sacrifices”

We shall commence our study by defining some of the most basic terms concerning our subject. A more thorough investigation would also include a study of the sanctuary and the priesthood, for these are integrally linked with the offerings. For this book, we shall have to be satisfied with the occasional mention only. However, it is common, especially in passages written after the Mosaic Law was instituted, to read about the sanctuary, priesthood and offerings in close proximity to each other within any given Bible text.

What is the difference between “offerings” and “sacrifices”?

All sacrifices were offerings, but not all offerings were sacrifices. An “offering” is a broad term for a tangible presentation or gift brought to God. The word “sacrifice” carries a more specified meaning.

An offering presented to God may have been in the form of an animal that was to be slaughtered, but it is also a word to describe material goods, money, even some grain-based presentations such as a loaf of bread, a pan-fried cake, and so on. Conversely, the English word “sacrifice” usually translates a Hebrew word implying the slaughter and presentation of animals. Note that this is a general rule, because English translations of the Hebrew words relating to this subject are inconsistent. Animal sacrifices were a form of offering and they were the commonest kind, but they were not the only kind. Offerings of money, grain-based foods and other goods, whilst also presentations to God, are not usually thought of as “sacrifices”.

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Offerings - a Biblical definition

The New Testament provides us with a broad definition of what is meant by the term “offering”, but we shall have to visit the Old Testament first to understand it.

In Leviticus 1:2, the word “offering” occurs twice -

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘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.’

Both times in this verse, “offering” is translated by the Hebrew word *qorban*, sometimes spelled *corban*, *korban* or some other minor variation. The same word is found in the New Testament, where we are given its definition: “Corban, that is, a gift” (Mark 7:11). So, an offering is a gift and in the Bible, specifically, most offerings are gifts to God.

Sacrifices - a Biblical definition

The Old Testament Hebrew text contains a variety of words to describe the various nuances of the offering system. Exodus 34:25 is a good example of the use of the word “sacrifice” in the Old Testament:

You shall not offer the blood of My **sacrifice** (*zevach*) with leaven, nor shall the **sacrifice** (*zevach*) of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.

In both instances, the English word “sacrifice” is a translation of the Hebrew word *zevach*, which most often indicates an animal that has been slaughtered and prepared for offering to God. Whilst there are occurrences of *zevach* that should be treated more figuratively (e.g. Psalm 51:16, 17), it is a general rule that the word sacrifice relates specifically to an animal slain for making a presentation to God.

The New Testament Greek text employs a smaller range of words to encompass the facets of the offering process. The Greek word *thusia* usually equates to the Hebrew *zevach* in that it most often refers primarily to flesh offerings burnt on the fire of the altar:

... they brought Him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ... and to offer a **sacrifice** (*thusia*) according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:22,24)



Model of sacrificial altar
in Timna Park, Israel.

Notably, the Greek word for altar, the place of fire for a sacrifice, is *thusiasterion*. Hence, *thusia* also includes a broader sense of meaning any type of offering placed on an altar to be burnt, flesh or non-flesh. This sort of usage is characteristic of the New Testament, which speaks in more general terms about the offering system. It is in the Old Testament that we see the nuances between the different offerings described in more detail. The Hebrew words behind the English frequently give us an accurate clue as to the type and purpose of the

offering being referred to. On the other hand, it is often difficult to tell exactly what type of offering is being referred to in a New Testament passage, and this may be because the references there tend to be symbolic or general, such as in the following verses -

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living **sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

... 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)

This sort of usage is more to do with application, or how we “apply” the teaching of the ancient offering system to the Christian walk. We shall consider that side of things later in Chapter 18.

Summary

From here on, we shall use the term **offering** to mean “a gift to God”, and **sacrifice** to mean “an animal slaughtered as an offering” or “an offering involving the slaughter of an animal”. Bear in mind that not every occurrence of these words in the Bible fits neatly within these definitions, so an observation of the context in each case is vital for the most accurate interpretation.

Chapter 3: Core Principles Governing the Sacrifices

We now come to consider some rather important principles associated with the offerings and sacrifices. As stated earlier, people presented offerings as part of their worship of God, to approach Him and be in a right relationship with Him. When faced with trying to understand the Biblical system of offerings, especially that which formed part of the Mosaic Law with all of its complex regulations, it can be quite overwhelming. In due course, we shall consider some of the finer details, such as the specific weights and measures of certain foods, the prescribed timings, locations and so on. Firstly, however, it should first be noted that the offerings were all governed by an overriding series of fundamental principles:

- Mankind's fallen relationship to God had to be addressed.
- Atonement had to be made in order for a person to be right before God and have fellowship with Him.
- God provided the means of atonement.
- The attitude of those approaching God had to be genuine.
- There was no provision for intentional sin under the Mosaic Law.
- Offerings always cost the offerer something.

We shall now discuss each one of these in more detail.

Principle No.1 - Mankind's fallen relationship to God had to be addressed.

Mankind is God's creation (Genesis 2:7), and God is superior to mankind in every way (Isaiah 40:13,14). For a while, the earliest humans enjoyed unhindered fellowship directly in God's presence (Genesis 2:16-25). There was a closeness between the Creator and His creation, even though the two parties were not equals.

Then came man's rebellion (Genesis 3:6, 7). Sin entered the world, and this had many ramifications. Among other things, God would not allow His perfection, holiness and purity to be compromised; hence, sinful Adam and Eve were banished from God's immediate presence (Genesis 3:23,24).

After this monumental event, not only did a physical gulf come between God and mankind, but an obstacle to fellowship hindered their relationship, and has continued to do so ever since, "for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Onwards from this point of banishment, if man wished to have fellowship with God, if he wished to be accepted by God, if he wished to be right before God, or even if he just wanted to approach God, this gulf caused by mankind's sin and sinful nature needed to be addressed.

The sinful nature in mankind remained after Adam and Eve's generation, and is still with us today. The Apostle Paul referred to it as the "sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:20). Sin is a

big problem to mankind because a significant consequence of sin is death. The phrase, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) is well known to most of us.

In Adam and Eve's case, animals were probably killed, not only so that the humans could be clothed with skins (Genesis 3:21), but so that they would not immediately suffer “the wages



of sin”, i.e. death. It is possible that God could have provided the humans with clothing miraculously produced from nothing, but it is more likely that two animals were killed (one for each person) and that these substituted for the lives Adam and Eve should have lost. Putting it simply, this act made them acceptable before God, and allowed a degree of fellowship to be maintained, even though they were not permitted to stay in the Garden. At the very least, it brought them to the point where God tolerated their existence, despite having the presence of sin in their lives.

In the centuries following Adam and Eve's expulsion, other people such as Abel, Noah and Abraham offered animals as substitutes for the lives they themselves should have forfeited. Later, in the case of those under the Mosaic Law, a multitude of sacrifices were again offered for the same purpose, this time with some additional reasons.

As for us today, we are also under the same curse of sin; we have the same sinful nature that separates us from God, and this gulf still needs to be addressed if we are to be acceptable in God's sight. However, instead of slaughtering animals, a single substitutionary sacrifice has been made on our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ, once for all (Hebrews 10:10). This idea will be discussed further in Chapter 16.

The rudiments of what God requires from mankind in order to have fellowship with Him have remained the same throughout the ages, even if the circumstances under which offerings and sacrifices have been made over that time have varied somewhat. Sin separates us from God, and the wage of sin is death; if we seek God's acceptance and fellowship, a substitutionary sacrifice must be made. A living being must die in our place. In ancient times, the substitutes offered were animals; today our substitute is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians don't make animal sacrifices these days; nor should we, because Christ is our substitute. However, a by-product is that it is easy for us to become a bit complacent, and forgetful of important truths which the regular sacrifices of Bible times constantly brought to the offerers' minds – namely, God's creation of man, God's superiority to man, mankind's alienation from God, and God's provision of ways for man to be reconciled to Him.

Any relationship is full of complexities, and mankind's relationship to God is no different. Nevertheless, to understand the offering process and its significance, we must be certain of the nature of the relationship between God and mankind.

Principle No.2 - Atonement had to be made in order for a person to be right before God and have fellowship with Him.

“Atonement” is a word that is central to the idea of some offerings in Scripture. The meaning of this word in English has changed over the centuries, so we need to take care when we read it in the Bible.

In Leviticus 1:3,4, we read some instructions for making a certain type of offering:

If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish ... it will be accepted on his behalf to make **atonement** for him.

We will look at this particular “burnt sacrifice” offering in due course, but note for the present that atonement is mentioned about 50 times in Leviticus alone. Atonement is a very important word when it comes to understanding the sacrificial offerings.

In the Scriptures, to atone is to “cover” over sin to the point where a person’s sin and sins are no longer an obstacle to God accepting that person, to the degree where God’s wrath is averted. Because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), a person’s sin should result in their death. Atonement is “made”, or the process of atonement is complete, once God has deemed that the obstacle to acceptance has been removed or been sufficiently dealt with. It may be said that atonement is a form of appeasement or propitiation; the “covering” of sin to the point where man’s sin no longer is a barrier preventing God accepting man. Once atonement has been made, this opens the way for reconciliation and fellowship with God.

Adam and Eve were not killed the day they sinned, even though the penalty for sin is death. Their instant death was staved off because animals died in their place. Not only was their nakedness covered, but the presence of sin that would otherwise have totally severed their relationship to God and brought about their deaths was also covered from God. Whilst their sin was not without its consequences (i.e. their sin brought about their alienation and instigated the mortality process), the provision of skins and the death of the animals that God provided for them was a form of atonement and deemed to be enough to save the lives they should have instantly lost.

Throughout the ages, God has provided prescribed ways for a person’s sins and sinful nature to be “covered” from His sight, to the point where the sin has ceased to be an obstacle to being right before Him. When God’s provisions have been accepted and acted upon, His wrath has been averted. Generally, atonement has been made via the death of an acceptable substitute. Up until the cross, the acceptable substitute was an animal:

... the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD. Then the bull shall be killed before the LORD ... So the priest shall make **atonement** for them, and it shall be forgiven them. (Leviticus 4:15, 20)

[Aaron shall] come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make **atonement** for himself and for the people. (Leviticus 16:24)

Since the crucifixion however, the acceptable substitute has been the Lord Jesus Christ:

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of **atonement**, through the shedding of his blood - to be received by faith. (Romans 3:25 NIV)

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be **saved from wrath** through Him. (Romans 5:8,9)

(See also 1 John 2:2; 4:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:9,10)

For further discussion about this subject, see “Appendix 2: “Atonement - some additional comments”.

Principle No.3 - God provided the means of atonement.

A common misconception is that the commands surrounding the animal sacrifices were penalties for committing misdemeanours. That is incorrect.

The offering routine was not a system of fines. Rather, it was a set of practices that God provided to mankind in order to pave the way for fellowship with Him. We will cover some of the different types of offering in Chapters 4 to 9, but let the reader observe for the present that, far from being a scheme of penalties, it was a system of grace and provision on God’s part in which a person who wished to be right before God was permitted to participate.

Consider the following example. A man in Old Testament times may have been caught lying about some situation (e.g. Leviticus 6:1-7). It is not accurate to say that the man was then “punished” for his sin by having to slaughter and sacrifice one of his choicest rams. That man’s inherent sinful nature and the individual acts of sin committed by him brought about an obstacle to a right relationship with God. Even though his sin warranted his death (Romans 6:23), God allowed that man to offer particular sacrifices specific to his situation, in order that atonement might be made. In other words, God Himself provided the way for that man’s sins to be covered so as not to cause offence to Him and incur His wrath.

From the moment sin entered and placed a barrier between God and man, God has consistently reached out to mankind and provided ways for reconciliation to take place, or for “peace” to be made. He was under no obligation to do this; thus God is rightly and frequently spoken of as being merciful:

... the LORD God, **merciful** and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6)

... showing **mercy** to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Deuteronomy 5:10)

God did not create mankind and then abandon them the moment they became tainted with sin; in fact, He did just the opposite. Constantly, He has mercifully and lovingly reached out to His creation to reconcile the human race to Himself. The offering system was just one of these ways God provided for mankind's needs.

For more about this subject see "Appendix 2: Atonement - some additional comments".

Principle No.4 - The attitude of those approaching God had to be genuine.

Observing the prescribed regulations God had revealed to people was important. However, this was only part of the process. An attitude of genuine worship, humility and reverence was essential. In attempting to understand the sacrificial system, it is common for modern-day students to wonder whether God always accepted the offerings that the ancients presented. The simple answer is "No", God did not always find the offerings of men acceptable. This is because the primary attitude of the offerer was to be along these lines:

To love [God] with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is **more important** than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33 NIV)

If a person approached God with a sincere attitude of worship, and heeded His prescribed method of offering, that person was accepted. The story of Cain's killing of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-15) raises many questions, but some vital clues about the required attitude of the offerer are given in the following verses:

... the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:4-7)

The phrase "If you do well, will you not be accepted?", along with Cain's response of anger and killing his brother, reveals that Cain was not primarily interested in worshipping the Lord, even though he had presented an offering. The same may be said of the Jews of Isaiah's time (c.700 B.C.), many of whom were going through the motions of presenting offerings according to the Law, but not according to a spirit of true worship of God. The Lord said to these people:

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "**I have had enough of burnt offerings** of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats ... I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting ... Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:11-17)

As we have seen, sometimes God's rejection of sacrificial offerings was because the offerer's attitude was not appropriate. However, on other occasions, they were not acceptable because of a failure to observe God's prescribed regulations. In the following example, inferior specimens of animals were being presented, instead of the choicest ones, as was the requirement:

You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' And when you offer the blind [animal] as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick [animal], Is it not evil? (Malachi 1:7, 8a)

It should be said that, even in this instance of failing to observe the letter of the law, it really stemmed back to the priesthood of Malachi's time not truly respecting God with their ritual:

'A son honours his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?' says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' 'You offer ... the lame and sick [animal] Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?' says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:6-8)

Contrast those examples with King David. When confronted with the awfulness of his adulterous and murderous deeds against Uriah (2 Samuel 12:1-12); his response was:

I have sinned against the LORD. (2 Samuel 12:13)

and

You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart - These, O God, You will not despise. (Psalm 51:16,17)

To paraphrase John 4:24, God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in a true spirit. Whether we are referring to an ancient offerer of sacrifices or to a modern-day believer saved under the blood of Jesus Christ, this is an eternal truth: one's worship of God must be sincere. Insincerity towards God in word or gesture is not acceptable worship.

Principle No.5 - There was no provision for intentional sin under the Mosaic Law.

Further to the previous point is the idea of intention. Humans cannot help being in a naturally sinful state, but they do make choices about how to act. Intentional sin is a real slap in the face towards God. The pattern in Scripture is that even amongst Israel, God's chosen and redeemed people for much of the Bible, a high-handed or consistently defiant attitude towards God resulted in their offerings being of no effect. The Mosaic Law, established at Exodus 19 specifically for the Israelite nation, addressed this issue. In terms of offerings

seeking atonement for sinful acts under the Mosaic Law, we often read something like the following:

If anyone of the common people sins **unintentionally** ... then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats ... the priest shall make atonement for him and it shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 4:27-31. See also 4:2, 13; 5:15; 22:14; Deuteronomy 4:42; 19:4)

Such offerings were a provision for making atonement for unintentional sins. On the other hand, there was no provision for what we might call “intentional” sins:

But the person who does anything presumptuously [NIV - “anyone who sins **defiantly**”] ... that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him. (Numbers 15:30, 31)

The question of what actually constituted an intentional sin according to the Law is a complex one, but immediately after the above law was stated in Numbers 15:30, 31, the Scriptures give us an example of what sort of thing constituted such defiance, or “intentional sin”. Despite the earlier repeated and clear warnings to not work on the Sabbath (e.g. Exodus 20:10; 31:15; 35:2; Leviticus 23:3), Moses and Aaron were faced with a man found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. God’s edict was that “the man must surely be put to death” (Numbers 15:32-36). Now, the gathering of sticks is not usually designated to be a crime in too many societies, but the defiance and clear disregard for God in this instance was obvious. Thus, no provision of atonement was available for that individual.



Compare the seemingly trivial misdemeanour of collecting sticks with that of organising the killing of a man. King David lay with Bathsheba, and arranged that her husband Uriah would almost certainly be killed in battle, as indeed he was. The Scriptures’ commentary is that “the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Samuel 11:27). When confronted by Nathan the prophet about this, David’s response was not one of defending his horrendous actions; rather, he declared, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13). The child of this union became very sick, and David prayed and fasted for seven days. Despite this pleading, the child died, after which David prepared himself ceremonially “and went into the house of the LORD and worshiped” (12:15b-20), which would almost certainly have involved the offering of atoning sacrifices. David was then permitted to live and rule for many years with the Lord’s blessing.

This brings us back to the question of what constituted intentional sin. Perhaps it was an action that a person either (a) didn’t know was wrong or an offence to God; or (b) did know

was wrong but was committed during a lapse in focus on the things of God and regretted upon later reflection. The two extreme examples discussed above may seem as if God was inconsistent in His judgment: punishment of death for a man who merely picked up sticks, but acceptance for a man who had another person killed. However, motive and intent of heart have a major bearing on the issue. The man who collected wood was being outwardly brazen and defiant towards God; David's response, when confronted with his act, was one of repentance, and acknowledgment that he had offended God.

It seems that if a person was fully cognisant of planning an action that was going to contravene God's law, but God's view was not important enough to worry about or be a deterrent, then there was no provision for atonement available to that person. A person could not commit crimes and breaches of God's Law at will, not caring what He would think about it, and then expect that the presentation of a sacrificial offering to that same God would make everything well again. This is a somewhat complex area, especially given the premeditated nature of some sins, but the general rule of thumb was that if an Israelite's heart wasn't sincere before God, any offering he may have made was not acceptable.

Principle No.6 - Offerings always cost the offerer something.

"None shall appear before Me empty-handed" (Exodus 34:20) is a principle plainly stated in the Lord's edict from the Mosaic Law. This law specifically related to mandatory attendance at Israel's sanctuary during certain festival times (Exodus 34:23), but also applied to any who sought to draw near to God or be in a right relationship with Him. All approaches to God were to be accompanied by gifts, and all gifts offered to God were to cost the offerer something in the process, regardless of one's state of wealth.

When King David sought to obtain a threshing floor on a portion of land from a commoner for the purpose of presenting sacrifices, he was given the option of taking it for free. David's response sums up the correct approach:

Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing."
So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. (2 Samuel 24:24)

Specifically concerning the flesh sacrifices, it may be thought that the animal was sacrificing its life. However, the animal had no choice in the matter; rather, it was the owner of the animal giving up one of his personal possessions. It had to cost the offerer something. The animals acceptable for sacrifice were to be domesticated, of good quality, not in poor health, and of an optimum age in terms of their financial worth. As discussed earlier, the Jews after the exile (c.400 B.C.) transgressed in this regard, attempting to present substandard offerings:

"... you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" says the LORD. (Malachi 1:13)

To state the obvious, all animals presented for sacrifice also had to be alive at the time. Livestock that had already died were not acceptable. One could not stumble across a dead bull, for example, and use it as part of an offering. Worthless animals and goods had no place in the offering system. The materials used for offerings to God had to be of good quality. Even grain-based offerings had to be made from the finest flour (Leviticus 2:1), and so on.

Concerning monetary offerings and the cost to the offerer, the following passage shows us the Lord's opinion:

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on." (Mark 12:41-44 NIV)

Likewise, sacrificial offerings were to be of significant cost to the offerer, regardless of a person's wealth status.

Summary of the Principles Governing Offerings

Painting with a broad brush, we may sum up these six governing principles in the following way.

God created mankind to have fellowship with Him. When sin entered, this placed an obstacle in the way of true closeness between God and mankind. God's wrath was directed towards man and should have resulted in his death. But God, who is merciful, made provision for us in order to cover our sin from His sight so that His wrath towards us might be averted. This came at a cost, whether we are speaking of the offerer presenting his possessions or of Christ who gave up His own life. To be reconciled to God, a person must have his heart in the right place and approach Him with sincerity, accepting God's provision as per His requirements. Today this means putting one's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but in ancient times this meant offering sacrifices with a genuine attitude of worship.

Part B: Five Main Offerings

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Chapter 4: Distinguishing the Offerings

As mentioned previously, the term “offerings” covers a wide range of presentations to God, including monetary and other material offerings (e.g. Exodus 25:1-8; 30:13). From this point in our study, we will focus our attention primarily on those **offerings brought to the altar** that were either to be wholly burnt, or partially burnt and partially portioned out for other purposes. These mainly involved the sacrifice of an animal and/or the presentation of grain-based foods.

For what reasons did people make offerings?

Broadly speaking, we can say that the offerings in Bible times were gifts presented to God under a variety of circumstances for a wide range of purposes. Whilst some offerings were substitutionary, representing a life for a life, some were not about this at all. Plant-based offerings didn’t involve blood and, thus, were not acceptable as a substitute for a human life; such offerings served other functions.

In a very tangible form, the offerings of the Bible represented a wide range of expressions. Exactly what was being expressed depended on which type of offering was being presented: some demonstrated an acknowledgement of God’s greatness, some were offerings of thanks to God, some sought atonement, some were offerings symbolizing substitution (i.e. where a human did something deserving of death, an animal was offered up instead), some offerings were made as part of a vow, some were part of the consecration ceremony of the priests, and there were offerings for other reasons besides these.

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Five Main Offerings

In our English Bibles, we may observe five main types of offerings that were to be brought to the altar. Depending on the English Bible translation one is reading, the five types are usually referred to as:

- (1) The “Burnt Offering” (as it is referred to in most translations, including KJV and NKJV). This also sometimes termed a “Burnt Sacrifice” (mainly KJV and NKJV) - e.g. Genesis 8:20; Leviticus 1:4.
- (2) The “Meat Offering” (KJV) or “Grain Offering” (NKJV, NIV, NASB) - e.g. Exodus 40:29; Leviticus 2:1.
- (3) The “Peace Offering” (KJV, NKJV, NASB) or “Fellowship Offering” (NIV) - e.g. Exodus 32:6; Leviticus 3:1.

(4) The “Sin Offering” (most translations) - e.g. Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:3.

(5) The “Trespass Offering” (KJV, NKJV) or “Guilt Offering” (NIV, NASB) - e.g. Leviticus 5:15; 1 Samuel 6:8.

It can be argued that there are more than five types in Scripture, but other offerings, such as the freewill offerings for the articles of the tabernacle for example (Exodus 25:1-8), were carried out far less frequently. A summary of these five offerings showing their main features is set out in the accompanying chart on the next page.

A major obstacle faces the modern-day English-speaking Christian who is trying to understand the meanings of the sacrifices. Simply put, our Bibles have not always translated some of the common Hebrew terms very accurately, and this is particularly true of the words used to translate the five major offering types. That inaccuracy has greatly obscured some of the functions of the offerings to the reader of English, but it is not an impossible hurdle to overcome. Taking the time to determine the meaning of the relevant Hebrew word for each offering type will begin to reveal something of that particular offering’s true nature and intent, and give us a better understanding of the differences between each kind. It cannot be

... observation of the Hebrew words behind the English translation is quite necessary ...

stressed strongly enough that if we are to understand anything of the different offering types, an observation of the Hebrew words behind the English translation is quite necessary.

Referring to the accompanying chart, note that, a singular Hebrew word has been translated by two English words in each instance. For example, the two-word phrase “burnt offering” has been derived from the single Hebrew word *olah*, etc. This is worthy of note because, in contexts outside of the sacrificial offering process, these Hebrew words convey variant meanings, thus shedding further light on our study of these things. We will explore more of this in the following chapters.

Having commenced with an overview, we will now elaborate on the main distinguishing features of the most common sacrificial offerings. Chapters 5 to 10 of this book will deal with the main sentiments and ideas behind the different types. The exact procedures and their symbolism will be examined more closely in Chapters 11 to 14.

From here on, these offerings will most often be referred to by one of the suggested alternative names shown in the chart.

English Term(s)	Suggested Alternative	Summary
Burnt Offering (Burnt Sacrifice)	Approach Offering (Heb: ‘olah)	The most common of the sacrificial offerings. A general reminder of God’s superiority, and man’s sinful nature in comparison. This offering did not “take away” a person’s sin, but sought atonement, the aversion of God’s wrath, acceptance by God, and opened the way for closer fellowship with God. The Hebrew word <i>‘olah</i> relates to approaching God, and drawing near to God, who was considered to be up in the heavens. Examples: Exodus 29:38-42; Leviticus 1; 6:8-13; Mark 12:33.
Grain Offering (KJV: Meat Offering)	Tribute Offering (Heb: minchah)	An offering of thanks, homage and submission; an acknowledgement that the offerer owed their existence to God. Note that the word <i>minchah</i> , apart from referring to a particular offering of the Mosaic Law, has a wider range of meanings throughout the OT. In the Mosaic Law, this was a non-flesh offering, which almost always accompanied the <i>‘olah</i> (see above). Elsewhere, the meaning of <i>minchah</i> varies, depending on usage and context. Examples: Leviticus 2; 6:14-23; Numbers 28:5,8,9,12.
Peace Offering (Fellowship Offering)	Completion Offering (Heb: shelem)	Focused on the completeness of something which the offerer was experiencing, or that which had been lost and was now hoped for; e.g. the seeking of a request, or the completion of a vow. Three main varieties: voluntary offerings, votive offerings (i.e. related to a vow) and thank offerings. Examples: Leviticus 3; 7:11-21,28-36; Acts 21:23-26.
Sin Offering	Purification Offering (Heb: chatta’ath)	Not always addressing “sin” as such, this was more a purification offering, to atone for particular acts or states which usually resulted in that person being declared unclean before God, and thus in need of purification. As well as the breaking of commands, events such as childbirth and illness fell into this category. Examples: Leviticus 4-5:13; 6:24-30; 12:6-8; Luke 2:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21.
Trespass Offering (Guilt Offering)	Reparation Offering (Heb: ashahm)	Similar to the purification offering (see above), this offering was presented in instances when loss or damage had been caused to another party, either God or human. Usually included a monetary component by way of compensation, plus 20% interest, to the party wronged, in addition to the sacrificial offering itself still needing to be presented. Examples: Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10; Numbers 5:6-8.

Chapter 5: The “Approach Offering” (Hebrew: *‘olah*)

Common English Translations: Burnt Offering, Burnt Sacrifice.

Suggested Alternative Names: Approach Offering, Near Offering, Ascend Offering.

Hebrew Word: *‘olah* (Strong’s Hebrew No. 5930), pronounced “ghoh-lah”, though readers of English often find it easier to say “ho-lah” or even more simply, “oh-lah”. This Hebrew noun has nothing at all to do with burning, but is related to the verb *‘alah* (5927), meaning “to ascend”.

Rather than something being burnt, the suggested alternative names “approach-”, “near-” and “ascend-offering” far more accurately convey the intention behind this offering. The idea is that of a person, or group of persons, approaching God and seeking to draw nearer to Him who was considered to be up (i.e. ascended) in the heavens.

Examples:

Genesis 8:20 - Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered **burnt offerings** [*‘olah* - approach offerings] on the altar.

Exodus 18:12 - Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a **burnt offering** [*‘olah* - approach offering], and other sacrifices to offer to God.

Leviticus 1:4 - Then he shall put his hand on the head of the **burnt offering** [*‘olah* - approach offering], and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

2 Chronicles 29:27 - Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the **burnt offering** [*‘olah* - approach offering] on the altar.

Leviticus 1:1-17 and 6:8-13 set out some of the regulations for the approach offering.

Comments:

The common translations of “burnt offering” and “burnt sacrifice” in most English Bibles are a bit misleading, because they imply that this offering was burnt as opposed to the other varieties of offering brought to the altar. However, not only were the items presented for *this* offering burned, but such was the case for *each* of the other sacrificial offerings. The altar was involved in each of them, and when an altar was involved, burning took place. In that sense, each one of the five main types of offering we are considering were “burnt” offerings! This fact alone should serve to reinforce the need for looking more closely at the Hebrew words behind sacrificial activity.

The approach offering was the most common of the sacrificial offerings. It is recorded as having been presented by individuals such as Noah (Genesis 8:20), Abraham (Genesis 22:13), Moses (Exodus 10:25) and Jethro (Exodus 18:12) before the Mosaic Law was given. The frequency of this offering increased markedly after the Law's institution. The daily morning and evening offerings of the Israelites were approach offerings:

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. ... This shall be a continual **burnt offering** [*'olah* - approach offering] throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel ... (Exodus 29:38, 39, 42, 43)

Under the Mosaic Law, the approach offering was to be presented by the Israelite nation at least twice a day, each day of the year, including Sabbath and festival days (Numbers 28:9, 10, 15, 24, 31; 29:6, 11, 16, etc.). This offering was made upon many other occasions as well, such as upon the return of the ark from Philistine captivity (1 Samuel 6:13, 14), the placing of the ark into David's tabernacle (2 Samuel 6:17), the dedication of the temple erected by King Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:1), etc. Quite often, approach offerings were made by Israel's priesthood, national leaders and the nation as a whole whenever an event of national significance took place.

Its intention

All sacrificial offerings were an expression of some kind. In terms of its purpose, the approach offering opened the way for closer fellowship with God. It also was a general acknowledgement of God's superiority, and man's sinful nature in comparison. The sense rendered by the Hebrew word *'olah* was that of a person or persons approaching God and seeking to draw nearer to Him. God was considered to be up in the heavens, thus the connection with the term "ascended" can be seen.



The Christian today has the advantage of having approached God through Jesus Christ:

Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28)

we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)

We have been credited with righteousness because of Christ's sacrifice "once for all" (Romans 4:23-25; Hebrews 10:10). However, the ancient worshippers before Christ's time were not in such a position. A person's - and indeed all of Israel's - inherent sin needed to be atoned for frequently and regularly, and the approach offering addressed that requirement (Leviticus 1:4). A person's inherent sin was distinct from specific acts of sin requiring atonement, which were addressed by the purification and reparation offerings (see Chapters 8 & 9 of this book). This is not to say that Christians today are any less sinful, but because "it is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen ... who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34). Today we have Christ; in more ancient times, animal sacrifices were necessary. This gracious and all-sufficient work of the Lord Jesus Christ is an area we shall explore further in Chapter 16.

The daily approach offerings of the ancient Israelites kept open the way for them to have a closer relationship with God, both individually and as a nation. Hence, the words quoted earlier: "there [i.e. the altar of sacrifice] I will meet with the children of Israel" (Exodus 29:43). It also reminded the Israelites of their blessed but inferior place before the Lord. Effectively, to offer an approach offering was to express the thought to God that one wished to come back into the closest mode of fellowship with Him. One's natural sinful state meant that this was an often-repeated gesture.

The sacrifice itself

When an individual presented an approach offering, it involved bringing one of the best animals they could afford. Under the Law, this was always to be a living, domesticated animal, and could be a bull, sheep, goat, turtle dove or pigeon, depending on one's financial ability (Leviticus 1:3, 10, 14). Remembering that offerings always had to cost the offerer something, a person who was relatively well off was expected to bring an offering commensurate with their wealth. Doves and pigeons were the offerings of the poor. Whether rich or poor, the offerer was to present an animal of some cost.

Imagine taking an item of expense such as a new car to the local church and telling the minister that you'd like to offer it as a gift to God. From there it could be used in a number of ways. The church might put it to use to transport people to and from weekly services, or the minister could use it to visit members of the congregation who are sick or infirm. Alternatively, the church could just sell the car and use the funds for one of its ministry projects. These would all be worthwhile uses. Now imagine taking that new car to the church

as an offering to God, removing only the seat covers and then setting fire to the entire vehicle, burning it until nothing was left, and thinking that God would be pleased with this. We would never do such a thing - what a waste! Nevertheless, effectively, that is what the ancients were doing with their approach offering.

An expensive animal was a gift to God that could have been utilised in a number of ways (such as for work, for food, etc.) but instead was entirely incinerated. Under the Mosaic Law of the approach offering, the officiating priest was given the animal's hide (Leviticus 7:8) and the offerer walked away with nothing except the understanding that his inherent sin had been atoned for and that he was in an acceptable state before God: "...the **burnt offering** [*'olah* - approach offering] ... will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him" (Leviticus 1:4b). As discussed in Chapter 3 and Appendix 2, atonement is a necessary step to being right before God, opening the way to a deeper relationship with Him.

This was true of the ancient worshippers and their animal sacrifices, and it is true of people today seeking atonement through faith in Jesus Christ. So, was this "wasteful" sacrifice worth the expense of one's most valuable possessions? Unreservedly, we would have to say "Yes!".

More details of the exact procedures carried out in the presentation of this offering will be discussed later on in Chapter 13.

Chapter 6: The “Tribute Offering” (Hebrew: *minchah*)

Common English Translations: Meat Offering (KJV), Grain Offering (NKJV, NIV, NASB), Meal Offering (ASV, ERV).

Suggested Alternative Name: Tribute Offering.

Hebrew Word: *minchah*, pronounced “minka” (Strong’s Hebrew No.4503). Whilst most modern translations label this as a “grain” or “meal” offering (as in cornmeal or wheatmeal), the KJV labels it as a “meat” offering, giving the impression that some kind of animal flesh may have been presented. However, “meat” was a common way to describe food when the KJV first appeared in 1611. Of John the Baptist, it was said that, “his meat was locusts and wild honey” (Matthew 3:4 KJV), neither of which we would commonly call “meat” today. Now that difference has been clarified, it must be said that any translation of the word *minchah* relating to either meat or grain is quite inaccurate! Despite the common modern English Bible translations giving the impression that *minchah* means “grain” offering, the Hebrew word itself has nothing whatsoever to do with foodstuffs of any description.

Throughout the Old Testament, the word *minchah* variously describes not only this particular offering, but also the payment of tribute to a foreign king. It is also often used to describe a present, or sometimes offerings in a more general sense, so the meaning of *minchah* varies, depending on usage and context. The term “tribute offering” is the closest translation of the Hebrew word because, instead of attempting to describe one of the food items sometimes offered, it really tells us the purpose of the offering, i.e. that of being a tribute.

Examples:

Leviticus 2:1 - When anyone offers a **grain offering** [*minchah* - tribute offering] to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour.

Genesis 4:4, 5 - the LORD respected Abel and his **offering** [*minchah* - tribute offering], but He did not respect Cain and his **offering** [*minchah* - tribute offering].

1 Kings 4:21 - Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought **tribute** [*minchah* - not a food offering to be presented to a priest for burning on the altar, but a “tribute” of money and precious goods from the subdued nations] and served Solomon all the days of his life.

Leviticus 2:1-16 and 6:14-23 set out some of the regulations for the tribute offering.

Comments:

Under the Mosaic Law, this was a non-flesh offering (Leviticus 2:1). The fact that no blood or flesh was offered as part of the tribute offering under the Mosaic Law tells us that it was not a sacrifice for sin or a substitutionary sacrifice.

As for its meaning, the tribute offering was an offering of thanks, homage and submission; an acknowledgement that the offerer owed their existence and the provision of everything to God. A look at how the Hebrew word *minchah* is used elsewhere in the Old Testament will shed some light on this.

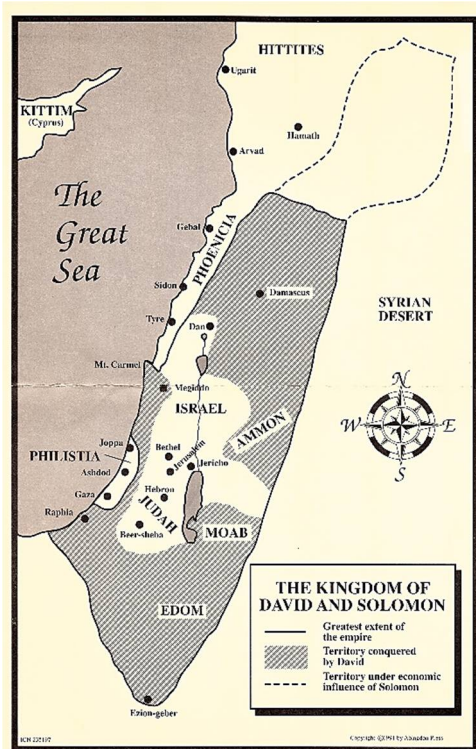
In Genesis 32:13, Jacob tried to appease his offended brother Esau with a “present” (KJV, NKJV) or “gift” (NIV), both translations of *minchah*. This was subsequently described by Jacob as “a present sent to my lord Esau” (v.18). Note the sense of deference and honour consistent with paying someone tribute. In that instance, the gift consisted of over 500 animals and not one grain-based food item, highlighting that such a tribute offering is not so much about cakes and loaves, but relates more to paying homage.

The tribute offering played a role in the story of Cain and Abel, too. Note that they both presented tribute offerings to God:

It came to pass that Cain brought an **offering** [*minchah* - tribute offering] of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his **offering** [*minchah* - tribute offering], but He did not respect Cain and his **offering**. (Genesis 4:3-5)

Why one was accepted and the other rejected may have been because the Lord had required flesh offerings, or perhaps because Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and Cain’s offering doesn’t seem to have been of the same quality. Bearing in mind that tribute offerings were about giving honour to the recipient, it would seem that Cain’s offering, for whatever reason, fell short of showing God the respect that was warranted. We are not told precisely why the Lord viewed each differently, but note that Cain and Abel both brought gifts described as tribute offerings (*minchah*), even though one was of flesh and the other was not.

The examples of Jacob, Cain and Abel each took place before Israel was established as a nation. After this, *minchah* occurs around 200 times, most of which refer to tribute offerings under the Mosaic Law, involving cakes, loaves of bread and other grain-based items. However, similar examples of *minchah* referring to the paying of tribute in the more general sense may be found occasionally. Moabites who became subject to King David brought him tribute (2 Samuel 8:2), and nations that were ruled by King Solomon brought him tribute (1 Kings 4:21). Such nations are referred to as “vassal states” and gifting a portion of their possessions was a way of acknowledging that the superior power was permitting the inferior nation to survive. What would happen if the lesser nation did not present their tribute? Such a thing took place around 605 B.C. when the depleted nation of Judah became a vassal state of



The map above shows the regions outside of Israel that were to pay her a tribute (1 Kings 4:21).

Map from Abingdon Press

the Babylonian Empire. For a while, the required tribute was duly presented by the subdued Jewish King Jehoiakim, but when he stopped handing over the tribute, the Babylonian forces came down hard on the rebellious vassal, eventually resulting in the exile of the Jews to Babylon. Vassal states were obliged to deliver tribute in order to ensure their survival and continued existence.

Having seen the nature of tribute in general, let us now focus again on that offering which was specifically brought to the sanctuary and offered via the priesthood under the Mosaic Law. It was a gift to God - most often a required gift - expressing homage, thanks and submission. In this way, the offering of the genuine Israelite worshipper was quite similar to that of the vassal states described above. In presenting the tribute offering, the worshipper was symbolically showing reverence and submission, and acknowledging that they owed their very existence to God.

Under the Mosaic Law the materials of tribute offering were mainly grain-based. Chapter 13 of this book outlines some of the particular procedures involved

with presenting this offering under the Law, but some generalities should be mentioned here. It could be presented in differing forms like cakes, loaves, flatbreads or just loose grain (Leviticus 2:5-7, 14). Note that no flesh was sacrificed, so this offering in itself did not seek to present an animal as a substitute for a human life. Having said that, the tribute offering quite often accompanied the approach offering, and the two would frequently be offered together in one ceremony, one immediately after the other (e.g. Exodus 40:29; Leviticus 9:17; 14:20). Combined, this double faceted presentation of the approach offering and the tribute offering sought atonement, whilst expressing humility and respect. These two were closely aligned because both were concerned with a person or the people's nature, rather than their behaviour or sinful actions: i.e. *who they were* in relation to God, rather than *what they had been doing*.

It was essential that the Israelites of old be thankful to God for His mercy and provision of life in every way. This is an essential attitude for the Christian of today to have, also: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Chapter 7: The “Completion Offering” (Hebrew: *shelem*)

Common English Translations: Peace Offering (KJV, NKJV), Fellowship Offering (NIV).

Suggested Alternative Names: Completion Offering(s), Wholeness Offering(s).

Hebrew Word: *shelem*, pronounced “shellem”, but is usually found in the plural form *shelemim*, pronounced “shellemeem” (Strong’s Heb. No. 8002). It is derived from the Hebrew word *shalom*, commonly translated as “peace”. Many readers will recognise *shalom* as the Jewish greeting expressing a wish for general wellbeing and peace in a person’s life, hence a sense of wholeness. In an offerings context, most English Bibles translate *shelemim* as “peace offering” or “fellowship offering”, which is a lot closer to the mark compared with the confusing terms “burnt offering” and “grain offering” that we have already discussed. Peace and fellowship emphasise something of the sentiment being expressed by the offerer in this instance, though the terms completion and wholeness more accurately portray the general sense of this offering. As mentioned, the word *shelemim* is plural; this is because it functions as a covering title for three different varieties of offering: the thank offering, the voluntary offering, and the votive offering, relating to vows.

Examples:

Leviticus 3:1 - When his offering is a sacrifice of a **peace offering** [*shelemim* - completion offering; literally, “When his offering is a sacrifice of {the} completion offerings”], if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD.

Leviticus 7:11, 12a, 16a - This is the law of the sacrifice of **peace offerings** [*shelemim* - completion offerings] which he shall offer to the LORD: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then ... [etc.]. ... But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow or a voluntary offering, then ... [etc].

Leviticus 3:1-17 and 7:11-36 set out some of the regulations for the completion offering.

Comments:

As the name suggests, the completion offerings focused on the completeness of something in the life of the offerer. Various, completion might have been what the offerer was experiencing, what they were seeking, or a reference to that which had been lost and was now hoped for. Broadly speaking, we could say that these offerings were presented (a) when a person was making a request of God, (b) when a request had been granted, or (c) upon the conclusion of one’s vow to God or another person. Each circumstance included a sense of completion either being sought or having been achieved. These aspects will be discussed in more detail shortly.

In an offerings context, Bible versions vary as to whether *shelem* should be translated “peace-offering”, or something like “fellowship-” or “wellbeing-offering”. These ideas are included in the related Hebrew word *shalom*, as are thoughts of good health and absence of trouble. A notion of wholeness was expressed by this offering via thankfulness at the completion of a vow or some phase in a person’s life, or a looking forward to something which God may hopefully bestow upon the offerer. This was an offering acceptable to God only after the obstacles of sinful actions and a sinful nature had been set aside and there was “peace” between the offerer and God. Hence, completion offerings were not usually made unless an

... this offering was acceptable only after the obstacles of sinful actions and a sinful nature had been set aside, and there was “peace” between the offerer and God ...

approach offering had earlier been presented. Under the Law, a person who was out of fellowship with God in some way, either by being in a ceremonially unclean state or having committed some kind of unatoned misdemeanour, would not be able to present a completion offering. This aspect is dealt with later in Chapter 10, where we will further discuss the appropriate sequence of offerings.

A brief look at some occasions at which completeness offerings were made should prove helpful. Peace offerings are mentioned in Exodus 24:5, where they are described as being presented upon the ratification of the covenant at Sinai, an occasion at which a vow was made. Almost forty years later, on the day that the nomadic

Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the promised land, they were instructed to present completion offerings (Deuteronomy 27:5-7 cp. Joshua 8:31). Both of these occasions carried a sense of wholeness: the first, cementing the young nation’s new covenant relationship with God; the second, commemorating the fulfilment of one of God’s promises.

In between those occasions, somewhat less gloriously, whilst the Israelites were camped at Mt. Sinai, a number of the people constructed a golden calf saying, “This is the God that brought you out of Egypt”. On this occasion, completion offerings were made (Exodus 32:4-6), but to a pagan god. At that time, the very young nation of Israel was still largely Egyptian in culture and practice, and this greatly influenced their understanding of spiritual things. The presentation of completion offerings to a pagan god, probably Egyptian in origin, highlights that expressing various sentiments to higher powers via sacrificial offerings was not an idea exclusive to Israel and, more importantly, that the concept of completion offerings in general was well known to this people before they crossed the Red Sea. Although rather misguided and disobedient, this peace offering was an expression of the people intended to acknowledge the god that they thought had brought them out of Egypt, hence the idea of “completion”. In part, the idea was right but, on this occasion, the Israelites directed their worship, and sense of having had a request granted, to the wrong deity!

Focusing our thoughts once again on the sacred laws of the one true God, the completion offering ceremony was not finished until a concluding meal had been eaten. The parties involved were the offerer - and his family, where applicable - and the officiating priests (Leviticus 7:15-18, 28-34). To a degree, it was looked upon as a meal shared with God, who would have earlier “consumed” the fatty portions of the sacrifice via their incineration on the altar (Leviticus 3:3-5). Certainly, it was a shared meal eaten in the vicinity of God’s presence

and seen as including God in the ceremony. Thus, it was a strict law that nobody in an unclean state, male or female, could partake of this meal (Leviticus 7:20, 21). The sanctity of that fellowship was not to be tarnished in any way.

Upon the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan, completion offerings were to be made, and the corresponding meals were to be duly eaten (Deuteronomy 27:7). Once in the promised land, the sanctuary that had previously been transported from one place to another was to be established in a single location, the site where all offerings were to be presented. In the following edict, note the references to the sanctuary's location, the various completion offerings, and its associated meal:

You shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your **sacrifices**, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your **vowed offerings**, your **freewill offerings**, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall **eat** before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)



This type of concluding meal that strengthened the bonds between two or more parties occurs elsewhere in Scripture outside of an offerings context. Three men, and possibly a manifestation of Jehovah Himself, shared a meal with Abraham near Mamre (Genesis 18:1-16), whilst Lot shared a meal with two angels he encountered (Genesis 19:1-3). These shared meals tangibly confirmed fellowship and a coming together of parties that were previously separate. The later Mosaic edict about the included meal of the completion offering was

really just a formalisation of something that had been taking place for centuries in slightly different settings. Even today, we come together for a good celebratory meal with close friends and family for one special occasion or another. Allowing for certain contextual and cultural variances, that ancient meal was not too much different. In one way, it was like the Lord, the priesthood and the offerer all saying, “Let’s commemorate our coming together and enjoy each other’s company and fellowship”.

Three main varieties

Moving from the general concepts of these offerings to the more specific, we note that there were three main varieties of completion offering (Leviticus 7:12, 16). These were voluntary offerings, thank offerings and votive offerings (i.e. offerings related to a vow). Let us now consider the three varieties of completion offering individually.

Voluntary offerings:

Often appearing alongside votive offerings, these sacrificial gestures sprung freely from the heart of the offerer. There may or may not have been a specific incident prompting such a presentation. Voluntary offerings are mentioned several times in Scripture:

I will sacrifice a **freewill** offering to you; I will praise your name, LORD, for it is good. (Psalm 54:6 NIV)

Upon the return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem, a series of sacrificial offerings were presented to the Lord on behalf of the people. These are listed in Ezra 3:4, 5 concluding with the words, “... and those of everyone who willingly offered a **freewill** offering to the LORD.” Essentially, after several offerings had been made collectively on behalf of the returned exiles, many individuals also voluntarily presented gifts to the Lord via the altar.

Thank offerings:

As the name suggests, this was an offering presented as a form of thanks to God. When King Hezekiah reinstituted temple worship procedures after a lapse of some time, the people were encouraged to bring such offerings:

Hezekiah ... said, “Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD, come near, and bring sacrifices and **thank** offerings into the house of the LORD.” So the assembly brought in sacrifices and **thank** offerings ... (2 Chronicles 29:31)

The Psalmist urged his readers likewise:

Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the **sacrifices of thanksgiving**, and declare His works with rejoicing. (Psalm 107:21,22)

You have delivered my soul from death ... I will offer to You the **sacrifice of thanksgiving**, and will call upon the name of the LORD. (Psalm 116:8, 17)

Such sacrifices of thanksgiving were a form of completion offering.

Votive offerings:

With a few exceptions, peace offerings by individuals were mostly offerings of free will. People could choose to present a sacrifice to the Lord because they were thankful, because they wished to express devotion to Him, or perhaps because they were making a request to God, the offering being a tangible sign of their earnestness. Under certain circumstances however, the offering became mandatory, especially when the nation was being represented as a whole (e.g. the Feast of Weeks, Leviticus 23:19). Vows being fulfilled, such as that mentioned in Acts 21, also fell under this category, being mandatory under the circumstances. The apostle James told Paul:

“We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.” ... Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, **at which time an offering should be made** for each one of them. (Acts 21:23-26)

In this instance, the vow was almost certainly a Nazirite vow (see Numbers 6:1-21). Any male who sought to serve the Lord full time in a tangible way, but was not a Levite, could take this vow. When the time came for them to be released from that vow, certain ceremonies took place, including the presentation of a completion offering (Numbers 6:17). This was mandatory.

More generally, these offerings accompanied the making or completion of a vow. One example may be found in the life of Hannah (1 Samuel 1), who was childless for many years. When she went along to the sanctuary with her extended family, the Bible tells us specifically that she was sad and “did not eat” (v.7). This does not mean that she never ate, neither that she was on some kind of fast. Rather it indicates that she did not partake in the concluding meal of the completion offering. One year, whilst at the sanctuary, she prayed in anguish for a child and made a vow (v.10, 11). Eli the priest witnessed this and said:

“Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.” ... So the woman went her way and **ate**, and her face was no longer sad. (1 Samuel 1:17, 18)

Significantly, upon making her request and having an assurance that it would be granted, Hannah “ate”. There are other vows associated with these events, but this example shows something of the nature of the votive offering. Another illustration is the Psalmist’s pledge, continuing on from a passage quoted earlier:

You have delivered my soul from death ... I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my **vows** to the LORD. Now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the LORD’s house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 116:8, 17-19).

and elsewhere:

I will go into Your house with [approach] offerings; I will pay You my **vows**, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble. (Psalm 66:13, 14)

In this instance, the approach offerings and vows were probably two separate, though associated, offerings.

* * *

Collectively, these three varieties come under the banner of the completion offerings. Some of the procedural steps involved, unique to this offering, are tabulated and discussed later in Chapter 13.

Chapter 8: The “Purification Offering” (Hebrew: *chatta’ath*)

Common English Translation: Sin Offering (most English Bible translations).

Suggested Alternative Names: Purification Offering, Short-of-God’s-Standard Offering, Missing-the-Mark Offering.

Hebrew Word: *chatta’ath*, pronounced “hatta-ath” or “khatta-ath” (Strong’s Hebrew No. 2403). This word means “a missing of the mark”. Depending on the context, the same word, *chatta’ath*, may be translated as both “sin” and its corresponding sacrifice, the “sin offering”. However, what our English Bibles usually call the “sin” offering is really better thought of as an offering made to address a falling short of God’s perfect standard; literally a missing of the mark, rather than what we only usually think of as being a sinful deed. This offering sought to atone for particular acts or conditions usually resulting in a person being declared unclean before God, or short of His perfect standard, and thus in need of purification. Whilst the proposed terms “short-of God’s-standard offering” and “missing-the-mark offering” are more accurate translations of *chatta’ath*, they are quite cumbersome grammatically; hence, suggestion of the term “purification offering”. Besides being a simpler phrase to remember, it should help us to better comprehend what the offerer was expressing; namely, a desire to be clean and pure before God in respect to specific actions and circumstances.

The Hebrew word *chatta’ath* is a noun, and its verb equivalent is *chata’*. The verb often appears in our English Bibles in phrases like, “he shall confess that he has **sinned** [*chata’*]” (Leviticus 5:5) and “We have **sinned** [*chata’*] against the LORD” (Deuteronomy 1:41). Significantly, the intensive form, or Piel, of this same verb *chata’* takes the opposite meaning of “purify”, as found in the phrases “he shall **purify** [*chata’*] himself” (Numbers 19:19) and “take a young bull without defect and **purify** [*chata’*] the sanctuary” (Ezekiel 45:18 NIV). Like the noun, we see that the same verb can take two meanings - the action of shortcoming, and the action taken to rectify that shortcoming. Hence, the noun *chatta’ath* can refer to both a missing of the mark, as well as the purification offering presented to atone for it.

Examples:

Leviticus 4:3 - “let him offer to the LORD for his **sin** [*chatta’ath* - act of missing the mark] which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a **sin offering** [*chatta’ath* - missing-the-mark offering] .

Leviticus 14:2, 30, 31 - “This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: he shall be brought to the priest ... And he shall offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, such as he can afford - such as he is able to afford, the one as a **sin offering** [*chatta’ath* - missing-the-mark offering] and the other as a burnt offering, with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him who is to be cleansed before the LORD.”

Luke 2:22-24 - Now when the days of [Mary's] **purification** according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD'), and to **offer a sacrifice** according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.' *[This verse is from the New Testament and has been translated from Greek, not Hebrew; hence chatta'ath does not occur here. Nevertheless, it refers to a chatta'ath law in Leviticus 12 and is a New Testament example of the same offering.]*

Leviticus 4:1-5:13 and 6:24-30 set out some of the regulations for the purification offering.

Comments:

The purification offering is the closest thing to the concept that many people have about offerings; namely that, if a person sinned, a sacrifice could be presented to atone for their wrongful deed. That idea is not too far from the truth, but it is certainly not the whole picture, as we shall see shortly. Bearing in mind that "sin" is better described as being a missing of the mark, there are a number of scenarios that arose from a person or persons being deemed short of God's perfect standard, and therefore in need of presenting a purification offering.

Let us commence our discussion of this offering by considering a time before Israel was formed. Taking place prior to the introduction of highly regulated offerings, the incident of Cain and Abel becomes relevant to our discussions once again. Earlier, we saw how these two brothers certainly gave tribute offerings to God, but there is very likely a purification offering present in that story as well. After God rejected Cain's tribute offering (Genesis 4:5), we read the following:

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, **sin** [*chatta'ath*] lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." (Genesis 4:6, 7)

Most English translations and many commentators give the impression that the "sin" in this passage is an intangible force lurking in the shadows, seeking to pounce on an unsuspecting person like Cain, and that he should learn to conquer any sinful inclinations. However, this instruction of the Lord makes much more sense if we understand *chatta'ath* to mean, as it often does elsewhere, "sin offering", or more accurately "purification offering". With this in mind, both grammatically and contextually, it is very consistent with the pattern of sacrificial offerings throughout Scripture for Genesis 4:7 to read, "if you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, a **purification offering** lies at the door." The Hebrew word for "door" in this passage (*pethach*) is frequently used throughout the Old Testament as the door or entrance to the tabernacle. There were no actual doors in the tabernacle, but there were certainly entrances and gates. In Cain's instance, rather than being sin itself crouching, the *chatta'ath* may well have been an animal, such as a sheep or goat, sitting near the gate at the east of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). Like the sacrificial offering process itself, this

animal would have been provided by God for Cain to sacrifice, since he had fallen out of God's favour when he had earlier offered an inadequate tribute offering. If this interpretation is correct, it is further confirmation of what the purification offering was all about. God recognised that people would fall short of His perfect standards, and He provided a way to atone for that shortcoming. In the end, Cain compounded his offensive behaviour by killing his brother, and it seems that his pride held him back from accepting God's provision of a way to atone for that original failing.

There was no regulated form of purification offering before the giving of the Mosaic Law commencing at Exodus 19, at least there was none written down for the record. However, there was such a thing as the "clean" or "unclean" status of persons and animals before that time. For instance, Noah was told to take onto the ark, among other things, one pair of every unclean animal and **seven** pairs of every clean animal (Genesis 7:2, 3). From this we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, many children's books about this event are not accurately illustrated (how many times have you seen this story depicted with Noah gathering *seven* pairs of any animal?). Secondly, the early ancients knew plenty about what constituted purification in God's eyes, even if the extent of what they knew is not plainly spelled out in Scripture. Some of those clean animals were later offered by Noah in sacrificial offerings (Genesis 8:20), which goes some way to explaining why he needed to take on board more than two of some kinds.

It seems that, either there were no set regulations for purification offerings in the earliest of times, or the Lord made known His particular requirements in each case to the people involved; perhaps the circumstances for presenting this offering were just common knowledge at the time and we are generally unaware of this today. Whatever the case, all of that changed when the Law was given to the Lord's chosen nation at Mt. Sinai.

Under the Mosaic Law, the purification offering became more strictly regulated. For a start, the only way to approach God was by being an Israelite, or a Gentile who was willing to be subject to the laws given to Moses, effectively making them Israelites anyway (i.e. proselytes). In that context, the purification offering was to be presented upon the following occasions:

- (1) After an act of wrongdoing or omission breaching God's commands had been acknowledged and confessed;
- (2) After a period of uncleanness, brought about by accident, poor health, certain natural circumstances, or some other situation;
- (3) At each of the annual festivals (or feasts) of the Israelites;
- (4) At certain events involving priests, Levities, Nazirites or the sanctuary;
- (5) At times of national repentance.

Theologian Alfred Cave, in *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice* (p.102-103) suggests that, under the Law, the purification offering may be divided into three classes. This seems to be a sound conclusion, and we shall now discuss each of these three in order: purification offerings that had to do with precise sins, which we shall refer to as **specific sins** (see No.1

above); those presented in the **process of purification** (No.2); and those that had to do with **undefined sins** (Nos.3, 4 and 5).

(1) Specific sins under the Mosaic Law

As for an act of wrongdoing, this is what we most often refer to as a “sin”. In one sense, sin is a simple concept: it is an action that is against God’s command. Big or small, every sin falls short of God’s standard. As Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. That’s a simplistic way of looking at it, and it is entirely accurate, but it is not the only way it is presented in the Bible.

Reading the many laws set out in the Pentateuch, some transgressions of the law were clearly deemed as being more serious than others. Often, we read a phrase like, “if a person [performs some misdemeanour, etc.]... that person shall be cut off from his people” (e.g. Leviticus 7:27) or “... he shall surely be put to death” (e.g. Exodus 21:12). Essentially, these are two ways of saying the same thing, except that being “cut off” suggests the option of merely being exiled. Forming a precise and itemised list of what was considered to be an act of wrongdoing - those that could be atoned for via the purification offering - is not a simple task. It seems that when a misdemeanour had been carried out and the resultant action was **not** being “cut off” or “put to death”, this would allow a person to come back into fellowship with God and the nation by way of a process including a purification offering or, under certain circumstance, a reparation offering. It could perhaps be put this way, that, under the Mosaic Law, there were three main types of misdemeanours and their consequences. These were:

- (a) certain acts of wrongdoing or omission, requiring a purification offering;
- (b) certain acts of wrongdoing or omission, requiring a reparation offering;
- (c) certain acts of wrongdoing, demanding the exile or death of the offender.

We are really only discussing the first type of misdemeanour in this section - those specific actions for which God’s provision of the purification offering seeking atonement was made available. This is in contrast to the approach offering discussed earlier, which, among other things, addressed the broader aspect of a person’s inherent sinful nature. As for the other actions listed above, some of those deeds required a reparation offering, and we will deal with these in the next chapter of this book. Those deeds demanding exile or death were most serious and flagrant breaches of God’s law, or “high-handed” sins, and were not able to be addressed by any offering. For more details about these severest misdemeanours, see Chapter 3, Principle No.5 regarding intentional and unintentional sins.

The actual deeds requiring a purification offering were sometimes those that we often consider to be wrong, evil or in breach of God’s commands. These are broadly stated in the following terms:

If a person sins unintentionally **against any of the commandments of the LORD** in anything which ought not to be done ... let him offer to the LORD ... a sin offering [a purification offering]" (Leviticus 4:2, 3).

If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe **all these commandments which the LORD has spoken to Moses** ... then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer [among other things] ... one kid of the goats as a sin offering [purification offering]. So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering [purification offering] before the LORD, for their unintended sin. It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people did it unintentionally. (Numbers 15:22-26)

What exactly constituted the "commandments of the Lord" that could be breached extended far beyond the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20. They are also found in the latter portions of Exodus and throughout the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Actions requiring a purification offering fell under two general categories: unintentional sins (Leviticus 4:1-35) and sins of omission (Leviticus 5:1-13); in other words, what a person **did** that was against God's law, and what they should have done according to His law but **didn't do**.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are few instances in Scripture where we read of a wrongful action being done, that was then followed by the presentation of a purification offering. Plenty of times we read of sin, followed by severe consequences of exile and the punishment of death.

Two general types of sin seem to dominate the Old Testament narratives:

- The brazen defiance of God's chosen prophets. E.g. Miriam and Aaron's challenge of Moses (Numbers 12:1-10); Korah and company also challenging Moses (Numbers 16:1-4); King Saul disobeying the instructions of Samuel (1 Samuel 15:1-9).
- The worship of false gods. E.g. the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:1-9); King Jeroboam setting up unauthorised altars at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:30); the nation of Judah setting up pagan worship sites during King Rehoboam's reign (1 Kings 14:22, 23); and so on.

Other single incidents mentioned include such as the priestly sons of Eli dealing with the portion of consumable meat of the sacrificial offerings inappropriately (1 Samuel 2:12-17), the Israelites' sin in asking for a king (1 Samuel 12:19) and David's arranging of the killing of Uriah (2 Samuel 12:7b-9, 13, 20).

Each of the examples listed above are referred to as sins, and there are certainly others, the key being that they all come under the umbrella of being breaches of God's commandments (Leviticus 4:2; Numbers 15:22). The exact outcomes in each case varied - some people died

because of their actions, whilst some were allowed to live after suffering a consequence or punishment of some sort. The presentation of a purification offering is not always recorded in the Scriptural narrative in those latter instances, but it is apparent that they were certainly carried out on many occasions. For instance, we are told that a repentant nation of Judah under King Hezekiah made purification offerings once the temple had been cleansed (2 Chronicles 29:20-24). King David worshipped in the sanctuary after his confession (2 Samuel 12:20); this may or may not have included singing, but the “worship” in this instance almost certainly included a sacrificial purification offering.

So, what about the daily sins of common people? Solomon, in reference to the Israelite nation, prayed, “When they sin against You, for there is no one who does not sin ...” (2 Chronicles 6:36) and foreshadowed the more famous statement of the apostle Paul written about 1000 years later: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Commoners under the Mosaic law clearly sinned, and it seems likely that those with a contrite spirit and a heart for God would have duly brought their purification offerings to the sanctuary. On an all-encompassing scale, there was always the Day of Atonement to annually cover the sins of the whole of the people (Leviticus 16:30), ensuring that all scenarios had been addressed.

Leviticus 4:2 and Numbers 15:22, both quoted earlier in reference to actions a person might have done that breached God’s commandments, stipulate that the purification offering was only relevant to those who had committed sins unintentionally. This aspect has already been discussed in Chapter 3 Principle No.5, so we shall not look at it further here.

As for breaches of God’s commands brought about by what a person didn’t do, these are usually called sins of omission. In regard to such, Gordon Wenham in his commentary *The Book of Leviticus* (p.93) suggests that these were committed when “someone knows he ought to do something, but then forgets about it, it slips his memory ... In each case, when conscience smites the forgetful person, he must confess his sin and bring a purification offering.” Such a definition seems reasonable, but as the Scriptures do, we might also add the phrase, “when he realizes it ...”, indicating that such sins of omission may not have been recognised at all at first, but only some time after the fact. These included:

If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter - if he does not tell it, he bears guilt. Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether it is the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty. Or if he touches human uncleanness - whatever uncleanness with which a man may be defiled, and he is unaware of it - when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty. Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it - when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters. (Leviticus 5:1-4)

Some editions of the Bible have a subheading above Leviticus chapter 5 suggesting that these laws are relevant, not to the purification offering, but to the reparation offering. For the

moment, it will suffice to say that the passage quoted above is certainly relevant to the purification offering, and that any subheading suggesting otherwise albeit well-intentioned, is incorrect. This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter of this book.

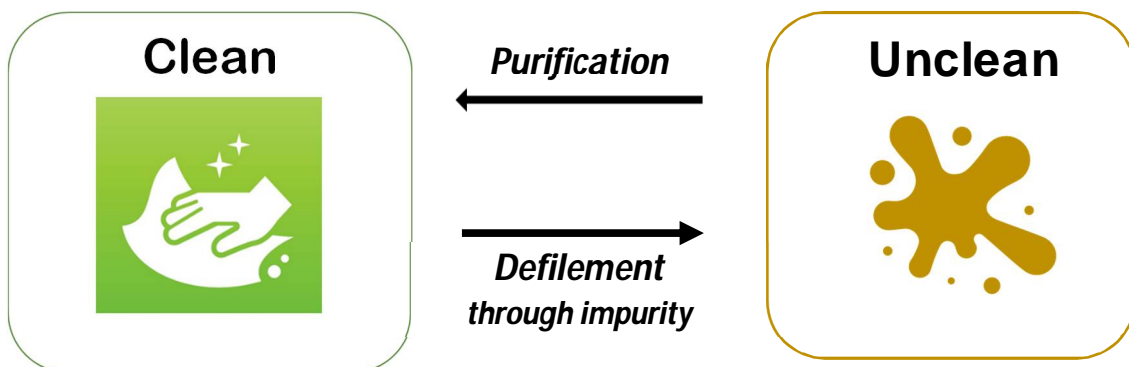
(2) The Process of Purification under the Mosaic Law

As already alluded to, occasions demanding the presentation of a purification offering extended beyond the carrying out of illegal deeds. This offering also addressed other circumstances that resulted in a person being **unclean** before God. Perhaps the most famous example of circumstantial uncleanness is that of Mary after giving birth to the baby Jesus. There was nothing sinful about this event in any way, but according to the Mosaic law, giving birth to a baby boy rendered a woman unclean for forty days.

If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean ... She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled ... If she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons - one as a burnt offering and the other as a **sin offering** [purification offering]. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean. (Leviticus 12:2, 4, 8)

For forty days after giving birth (i.e. seven days, plus a further thirty-three days), Mary was ceremonially unclean. Hence, we read in the New Testament, concerning Mary and her newborn:

Now when the days [i.e. the forty days] of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:22-24)



The basic principle of purification in the Bible.

Other circumstances, such as certain illnesses and bodily afflictions (Leviticus 14:2-20; 15:13-15), also brought about a condition of uncleanness. Whatever the cause, a state of uncleanness seems to have presented its biggest obstacle to the Israelites under the Law if they were to have **dealings with the sanctuary**. Moses was commanded:

Thus you shall separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness when they defile My tabernacle that is among them. (Leviticus 15:31)

This was the fate of Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, who entered the tabernacle, possibly the Most Holy section of it, and offered a form of incense contrary to God's earlier instructions (Leviticus 10:1-3; 16:1, 2; cp Exodus 30:34-38). Their act constituted a major breach of one of God's commands. Furthermore, they were now in an unclean state before the Lord and, in accordance with the principle set out in Leviticus 22:1-9, they were struck down for defiling the holy sanctuary, the place of God's earthly presence at that time. A priest serving in the sanctuary whilst ceremonially unclean was strictly forbidden, with death being the result.

In a general way, we could say that Exodus 25 to 40 presents laws about the **sanctuary**. The very next portion of Scripture, Leviticus 1 to 7, is about the sacrificial **offerings**. This is directly followed by Leviticus 8 to 10 concerning the **priesthood**. Immediately after, we are then given five chapters of laws about **cleanness** and **uncleanness** in Leviticus 11 to 15. Noting that sequence, we can see how important it was for the Israelite nation to be pure before God, and ceremonially clean when presenting their sacrificial offerings via the priesthood at the sanctuary. The purification offering played a vital role in that process. Hence, such an offering was presented when a person acknowledged a particular sin or, in some cases, when a person had been in a state deemed as unclean before God.

(3) Undefined sins under the Mosaic Law

This category of "undefined sins" involved a priest presenting the purification offering on behalf of others, whether those people had something specific to confess or not.

Such occasions included the consecration of the priests (Leviticus 8:14-17), the dedication of the altar of sacrifice (Numbers 7:11, 16), the dedication of the Levite servants of the sanctuary (Numbers 8:6, 8), a Nazirite vow being completed (Numbers 6:13-16), the dedication of the second temple (Ezra 6:17), the first day of each month (Numbers 28:15), and others. It was also offered on behalf of the nation at each one of Israel's annual festivals (or "feasts") once they were in the promised land: Passover and Unleavened Bread (Numbers 28:22), the Feast of Weeks, namely Pentecost (Leviticus 23:19), the Feast of Trumpets (Numbers 29:5), the Day of Atonement, (Leviticus 16:3, 5; Numbers 29:11) and on each day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Numbers 29:12-38).

As can be seen, sometimes this was the nation as a whole, sometimes it was a priest, a group of priests or a Nazirite involved with a vow. It was a kind of safety guard action carried out

on the understanding that people were likely to have sinned or been impure in some way. Even if they had earlier addressed some specific impurity, a purification offering was made on their behalf on such occasions anyway. This was one way of ensuring that the persons involved were ceremonially clean before having any other closer dealings with God, such as the formal worship of Him or service within His sanctuary.

The annual Day of Atonement was a day for Israel to mourn as a nation for their sinful deeds, and to atone for these and other actions resulting in impurity during the previous twelve months. Over a period of a year, the priesthood and the nation's people may have inadvertently missed seeking atonement for impure actions; hence the Day of Atonement held every year on the 10th day of the month of Tishri was when the nation stopped and lamented its shortcomings, whilst a purification offering was being presented on its behalf. The priesthood and even the very sanctuary itself were also considered to have become tarnished "because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel" (Leviticus 16:16) during that time period, and also required atonement (see also 16:17-20).

* * *

Generally speaking, when the Israelites sinned or became unclean in some other way, they were considered to be impure before God. A person was not to approach the sanctuary until their illness had cleared up (Leviticus 13:12, 13), their time of impurity was over (Leviticus 12:4), or they had approached a priest with a sacrificial offering (Leviticus 4:27-31).

Whether unintentional sins, sins of omission or certain states of impurity, all required the presentation of a purification offering; however, the precise details of the sacrificial process varied according to one's status within the nation of Israel. For example, what the high priest was to do if he breached one of God's commandments differed from what was expected of a commoner; what was required of the nation as a whole when faced with this situation was different to that of a leader within the nation. Leviticus 4 sets out these details, and the reader may refer to Chapter 12 of this book for further discussion about these different classifications. The particular procedural steps peculiar to the purification offering are discussed in more detail in Chapter 13 of this book.

Chapter 9: The “Reparation Offering” (Hebrew: *ashahm*)

Common English Translations: Trespass Offering (KJV), Guilt Offering (NIV).

Suggested Alternative Names: Reparation Offering, Negligence Offering, Compensation Offering.

Hebrew Word: *ashahm*, pronounced “arsharm” (Strong’s Hebrew No. 817). The simplest translation of *ashahm* is “guilt”, but a number of related variant meanings need to be considered as well. Whilst the word *ashahm* (817) is a masculine noun, used to describe both a state of guilt and the offering associated with it, its feminine counterpart *ashmah* (819) seems to refer more to specific acts incurring guilt. The verbal equivalent, *asham* (816), means more broadly “to be guilty”. There is also an adjectival form, *ashem* (818), which occurs only a few times, and relates to a person or persons being in a state of guilt.

In the same way that, for the purification offering, *chatta’ath* literally means both a missing of the mark and the offering to rectify it, the Hebrew word *ashahm* means guilt but is also used to describe a remedy for guilt. Hence, the NIV translation of *ashahm* as “guilt offering” is quite close to the mark. Despite this, the term “reparation offering” is preferred because it highlights the intent behind that particular gesture, and also helps to show a clearer distinction between this offering and the purification offering. We shall discuss the specific “reparation” aspect in the comments section below.

Examples:

Leviticus 5:15 - If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the LORD, then he shall bring to the LORD as his **trespass offering** [*ashahm* - reparation offering] a ram without blemish from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a **trespass offering** [*ashahm* - reparation offering].

Leviticus 5:17, 18 - If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD, though he does not know it, yet **he is guilty** [*asham* - guilty] and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a **trespass offering** [*ashahm* - reparation offering].

Leviticus 6:2, 5-7 - If a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by lying to his neighbour about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or (etc.) ... he shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his **trespass** [*ashmah* - guilty act; i.e. the day that he shall be brought to account for his guilty act] ... And he shall bring his **trespass offering** [*ashahm* - reparation offering] to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the

flock, with your valuation, as a **trespass offering** [*ashahm* - reparation offering], to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he **trespasses** [*ashmah* - guilty act; i.e. “things they did that made them guilty” - NIV].

Leviticus 5:14-6:7 and 7:1-10 set out some of the regulations for the reparation offering. [Note that the instructions regarding this offering do not begin at 5:1, as some Bible editions suggest, but at 5:14.]

Comments:

Before proceeding further, let us remind ourselves that, under the Mosaic Law, there were three main types of sins, each with respective consequences: (a) certain acts of wrongdoing or omission, requiring a purification offering; (b) certain acts of wrongdoing or omission, requiring a reparation offering; (c) certain acts of wrongdoing, demanding the exile or death of the offender. Like the purification offering, the reparation offering was related to specific sinful or negligent acts placing a person out of close fellowship with God.

In addition to the presentation of a sacrificial animal, what is most often called a “trespass offering” or “guilt offering” sought to compensate for or repair the damage done to a third party; hence the alternative suggested names of “reparation offering”, “compensation offering” and “negligence offering” for this presentation. A monetary component comprising restitution plus 20% interest was also usually given to the party wronged by the action. This is stated clearly in the Mosaic law:

Because he has sinned and is guilty ... he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall **restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it**, and give it to whomever it belongs... (Leviticus 6:4, 5)

To be clear, the reparation offering was not a payment for one’s sin. Rather, it was an offering seeking atonement from God, and most often accompanied by a gesture of compensation to the offended party. Note, firstly, this offering included the sacrifice of an animal to God because the offending action, no matter who was injured, required atonement in order to be granted the Lord’s forgiveness. Guilt implies a liability to punishment, and since the wages of sin is death, this action needed to be atoned for via a sacrifice, otherwise death of the offender would be the only fitting consequence. Again, we see that the offering system was not one of fines and penalties, it was God’s righteous and gracious provision. An offender could choose death (most offenders probably didn’t!), or take up the offer of atonement according to God’s sacrificial requirements. Secondly, whilst the wrongful action needed to be atoned for, there was still

... The reparation offering was not a payment for one’s sin. Rather, it was an offering seeking atonement from God, and most often accompanied by a gesture of compensation to the offended party ...

the matter of addressing the damage caused to the wronged party. Hence, a monetary component was included as a form of reimbursement, the extra 20% intending to address the added inconvenience suffered. A summary of these laws is given in the book of Numbers:

When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make **restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth** of it, and give it to the one he has wronged ... **in addition to the ram of the atonement** with which atonement is made for him. (Numbers 5:6-8)

What was the difference between a “sin” offering and a “trespass” offering?

One of the most challenging questions posed regarding the sacrificial system arises when comparing the English terms “sin” offering and “trespass” or “guilt” offering. What is the difference between the two? This question is almost impossible to answer using only the common English terms “sin”, “trespass” and “guilt” because, in modern-day usage, the words sin and trespass carry virtually the same meaning - and both of those words imply guilt!

Both the purification and reparation offerings sought atonement for specific individual circumstances that did not meet God’s standards of holiness, purity, cleanness and righteousness before Him. However, the short answer to the question above is that the “sin” or purification offering was appropriate in some cases of wrongdoing and certain circumstances causing impurity, whilst the “trespass/ guilt” offering or reparation offering was applicable when a person had caused detriment or loss to another party (God or human) and recompense was proper. There is more to it than that, but perhaps making this distinction will suffice as a starting point.

Atonement is mentioned only once in the entire text of Leviticus 1, 2 & 3, chapters concerning the approach-, tribute- and completion-offerings. However, it is mentioned ten times in Leviticus 4, 5 & 6, which concern the purification- and reparation-offerings. Likewise, guilt is not even mentioned at all in the first three chapters, yet it is mentioned nine times in the following three. It is obvious that guilt, and the subsequent need for atonement, is a central theme with these two offerings. Nevertheless, they are to be distinguished from each other, and we shall now attempt to unravel some of the differences.

... When translating ashahm, words like “sin”, “trespass” and “guilt” have often been treated as being interchangeable. In most Bible passages, this does not affect the overall meaning. Alas, this approach confuses the subject whilst we are reading about sacrifices ...

The translators of English Bibles have not always been consistent with translating *ashahm* and its variants. Hence, words like “sin”, “trespass” and “guilt” have often been treated as being interchangeable. In most Bible passages, this does not affect the overall meaning, because we can correctly gather from the text the intended sense that someone has done something wrong, regardless of which of these English words is used. Alas, this approach confuses the subject whilst we are reading about sacrifices and trying to determine why one type may have been offered as opposed to another. When we read about “sin” offerings and “trespass” offerings, they look like they should be the same

thing, but they are not. The only reliable way for readers of English to tell the difference when reading such passages is to observe the different Hebrew words via interlinear Bibles, and refer to Strong’s numbers or some equivalent word numbering system.

In terms of the slaughtering and offering procedures to be undertaken, the sin offering and trespass offering - which are referred to in this book by the preferred terms “purification offering” and “reparation offering” respectively - share several identical steps, but variations between the two are clear enough. The distinct features of each are set forth throughout Leviticus chapters 4 to 7, and we shall discuss some of the procedural steps later in chapter 13 of this book. However, the issue of exactly what sins and situations needed to be addressed by one of these offerings as opposed to the other is not as plain.

At this point, it is again helpful to remind ourselves that the sacrificial offerings were not fines or penalties, but tangible gestures expressing some thought or desire to God. Various, Israelites hoped to approach God, have their sins forgiven, be accepted by Him, have a right relationship with Him, express devotion to Him and seek requests from Him. In the case of some circumstantial uncleanness and certain sinful deeds, these had to be atoned for via the purification offering **before** a person could seek to draw nearer to God in other ways.

... the sacrificial offerings were not fines or penalties, but tangible gestures expressing some thought or desire to God ...

Hence, there was an order in which the offerings were to be presented. We shall discuss this sequence in Chapter 10, but this idea of sequence is relevant to the question of distinction because when the Israelites sought to express themselves to God via the system of offerings at the sanctuary, they had to be ceremonially clean in order to enter the enclosure. This meant that many obstacles or impurities had to be atoned for. Some of these hindrances “simply” rendered a person unclean, whilst others were obstacles to fellowship requiring that injury or loss caused to another party be dealt with first. It is here that we may be able to distinguish between the two offering types, not merely by the differences in sacrificial procedures to be undertaken, but by what was the nature of the offerer’s shortcoming and how the Lord required this to be addressed in each case.

As a general rule, we could say that all breaches of God's commands brought about an unclean state; however, some of these were allowed to be addressed by the purification offering, whilst others were trespasses against God or a fellow Israelite requiring some kind of value compensation as well as a sacrificial offering to God. Broadly speaking, the purification offering prevented contamination, especially of the sanctuary, whereas the reparation offering addressed issues deemed to wrongly impinge upon the Lord (usually in regard to the sanctuary) or a fellow Israelite.

The purification offering addressed actions deemed as shortcomings, such as wrongful deeds but also certain occurrences such as childbirth, various skin diseases, etc. Each of these placed a person in a state of uncleanness. However, the reparation offering was more limited in its scope, **addressing only wrongful deeds as well as certain accidents mainly brought about by negligence**. In certain cases where a person was deemed to be unclean because of some action or circumstance, a purification offering was appropriate; when a person was deemed to have caused harm or damage requiring reparation or recompense, a reparation offering was appropriate. The laws about these things are quite nuanced, and often presented in the text without further explanation. There is a little more to it, but these are some of the simpler ways by which we may be able to distinguish the two.

Which section in Leviticus is about the Reparation Offering?

The bulk of the laws concerning offerings appear in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. How purification and reparation offerings are presented there in our English Bibles will also have a bearing on our making a distinction between them. Most Bible editions have chapter and section headings, and at the beginning of Leviticus chapter 1, your Bible probably says "The Burnt Offering" or something similar. Chapter 2 will read "The Meat Offering" or "The Grain Offering"; chapter 3 will read "The Peace Offering" or "The Fellowship Offering"; chapter 4 will read "The Sin Offering". Leaving aside our preference of alternate names for these offerings, those section headings are all in the right place ... so far.



When it comes to denoting the point in the Bible text where the purification offering section ends and the reparation offering section begins, there is some debate. This has further caused to muddy the waters between these offerings. Some Bible editions have the section about this offering starting at chapter 5:1, by way of a subheading such as "The Trespass Offering" inserted before the chapter text commences, whilst others place the subheading above 5:14, as in most editions of the NIV, and some other translations. **This means that 5:1-13 reads as part of the reparation offering in some Bibles, but the purification offering in others.** Placing the break at 5:14 makes much more sense, as we shall see.

Verse 6 is the primary cause of confusion because, although clearly about the purification offering, the word *ashahm* has been translated as “trespass offering” in some Bibles:

He shall bring **his trespass offering** (*ashahm*) to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a **sin offering** (*chatta'ath* - purification offering). So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin. (Leviticus 5:6 - NKJV; KJV is similar)

Confusingly, it has been translated quite differently in other Bible translations:

As a **penalty** (*ashahm*) for the sin they have committed, they must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a **sin offering** (*chatta'ath* - purification offering); and the priest shall make atonement for them for their sin. (Leviticus 5:6 - NIV)

He shall bring to the LORD as his **compensation** (*ashahm*) for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a **sin offering** (*chatta'ath* - purification offering). And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin. (Leviticus 5:6 - ESV)

The *ashahm* in Leviticus 5:6 is neither the trespass offering, nor a penalty, nor a form of compensation, as suggested in the translations quoted above. The following suggested translation is far more cumbersome, but it is an attempt to highlight what is the more likely intent behind the relevant Hebrew words:

He shall bring **his offering to avert liability to punishment** (*ashahm*) to the LORD for his missing of the mark that he did by missing the mark, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as an **animal offering for his missing of the mark** (*chatta'ath* - purification offering). So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his state of having missed the mark. (Leviticus 5:6, my translation)

The *ashahm* here refers to an offering to avert liability to punishment for the misdemeanours mentioned in the preceding verses - misdemeanours that were to be addressed via a purification offering. Two clues in the text lend support to this. Firstly, the section regarding the purification offering commences with the words, “Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ...” (Leviticus 4:1), and it is not until Leviticus 5:14 that we read the similar phrase, “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ...”, indicating that this is probably a new section about a different offering. Secondly, the animal to be sacrificed in this instance is consistent with the purification offering to be presented by a commoner, mentioned earlier in 4:28, 32. Reading 5:1-13 as if it is about the reparation offering instead of the purification offering, as is suggested by the chapter subheading in some Bible editions, only serves to blur the differences between these two similar, yet quite distinct, sacrifices. To be clear, the purification offering laws are set out in 4:1-5:13, whilst the laws for the reparation offering are set out in 5:14-6:7, regardless of what well-meaning editors of the various Bible editions have inserted centuries after the original laws were given.

Which specific actions required a reparation offering?

In terms of what we would generally call breaches of God's law, the purification offering addressed acts that missed the mark and fell short of God's standards, whereas the reparation offering was presented as a result of certain actions that were deemed to be trespasses **against the LORD**, especially in regard to property, though not exclusively about that. These sins were more seriously viewed by God and required a sacrifice as well as full restitution plus 20% value.

Examples of actions demanding a reparation offering included committing a trespass or defiling action in regard to the holy things of the Lord (Leviticus 5:14-17; 22:14-16 - see below for further explanation of "holy things"), giving false testimony regarding property (Leviticus 6:1-5a) and the wronging of others in ways not covered by those previously mentioned (e.g. Numbers 5:6, 7; Leviticus 19:20, 21). As was the case for flagrant breaches of God's law, or "high-handed" sins, these were not covered by this offering. See Chapter 3, Principle No.5 for further discussion on intentional and unintentional sins.

Such misdemeanours often involved the sanctuary, referred to by the phrase "the holy things of the LORD". For example:

If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to **the holy things of the LORD**, then he shall bring to the LORD as his trespass [reparation] offering a ram without blemish ... [etc.] as a trespass [reparation] offering. And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to **the holy thing**, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 5:15, 16)

"Holy things" included any item dedicated to the Lord (Leviticus 22:3). The furnishings of the sanctuary, including the ark, the table of shewbread, the lampstand, the golden altar of incense, and their accompanying accessories all came under this category (Numbers 4:4-20). In one sense the "holy things" also included the priests, themselves having been separated unto the Lord (Exodus 29:9). This is probably why a Nazirite, if coming in contact with a corpse and thus defiled, was also to bring a reparation offering (Numbers 6:9-12). A Nazirite was a non-Levite who was therefore not qualified to serve as a "Levitical" priest, but had nevertheless taken a vow "to separate himself to the LORD" (Numbers 6:2). If considered as one whose life was dedicated to the service of the Lord, his uncleanness in such an instance most likely constituted a sin against one of the "holy things" of the Lord.



The lampstand, one of the "holy things".
Source: Myers Media

Other "trespasses against the LORD" actually came in the form of sins against one's fellow Israelite. Under the law, the people of that nation were "God's people" (Exodus 22:25;

Leviticus 26:12; Numbers 11:29; etc.) and it seems as if sin against one of those people was a direct affront against God Himself:

If a person sins and commits a trespass **against the LORD by lying to his neighbour** about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbour, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely ... he shall bring his trespass [reparation] offering to the LORD. (Leviticus 6:2, 3, 6)

In this context, we could say that all reparation offerings were made in response to actions causing injury or loss to the Lord. Any offence, particularly loss caused to Israelites, could be seen to have been an injurious act against God. In a different context, a sense of this is seen in the example of two Israelites, the sons of the priest Eli. Contrary to the law, they took of the best portions of the peace offering sacrifices for themselves, at the expense of both the Lord and others. The Lord's response to Eli and his sons was, "Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering ... to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?" (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 29). Despite being a different scenario, the principle is still the same. It wasn't only fellow Israelites suffering loss and harm, it was the Lord Himself also, because the nation of Israel belonged to God.

The reparation offering was unique to the Law

Unlike the approach-, tribute-, completion- and purification- offerings already surveyed, the reparation offering does not appear to have been practised in any form before the Mosaic Law was instituted. This was a new addition to the sacrificial system because two primary categories of sins linked with this offering were not in existence before the formation of Israel and the giving of the Mosaic law.

One category of sins addressed by this offering included trespasses against **one's fellow Israelite**. Prior to the exodus, the children of Israel had no God-ordained structure of government and, despite their distinctive heritage dating back to Abraham and the fact that they grew to be a tribe of significant numbers under bondage, they did not become a formalised nation until they left Egypt and began living under God's decrees. Simply put, Israel did not exist as a people in covenant relationship with God before the Mosaic law was given; hence, trespasses against "one's fellow Israelite" under God's law were not properly possible before that time.

The other category of sins dealt with only by the reparation offering concerned God's "holy things", as referred to earlier:

If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the **holy things of the LORD**, then he shall bring to the LORD as his [reparation] offering ... (Leviticus 5:15)

As we have seen, the “holy things” were objects dedicated to the service of the Lord, especially concerning the sanctuary. Such items included the furnishings of the tabernacle, as well as the tabernacle itself (Numbers 4:4-15; see also Numbers 7:9; 10:21; Deuteronomy 12:26; Ezekiel 22:26; 44:8). Food allocated for the priesthood, via the offerings presented by the rest of the nation, also came under this category (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 29; Ezra 2:62,63). Each of these were governed by strict regulations for their use. These objects were also not in existence before the giving of the Mosaic law, hence there was no offering relevant to these things earlier.

Some of the procedural steps peculiar to the reparation offering shall be discussed later in Chapter 13 of this book. This concludes our survey of the ideas behind the five major types of offering. Next, we shall consider the stages in one’s relationship with God represented by these various offerings.

Chapter 10: The Sequence of the Offerings

The offering system was essentially about a person's relationship with God, and the presentation of one kind of offering as opposed to another kind reflected a person's current standing before Him. In keeping with this, there was a sequence in which offerings were to be made, and this paralleled the progress of a person's acceptance by God and subsequent fellowship with Him.

To understand the sequence, think about how we relate to the loved ones in our lives, such as our family and friends. We interact with these people and, generally, we get on with them (hopefully!). However, from time to time, a situation may arise that causes a degree of tension between us and a loved one. If we are to fully enjoy each other's companionship, the cause of the obstacle impeding closeness must be acknowledged and dealt with. Depending on the circumstance, addressing this may mean replacing a broken item, apologising for a word spoken in haste, changing a repeated hurtful behaviour, and so on. If the relationship is to function at its closest, a point must be reached when whatever caused the tension is no longer hindering the relationship between us and our loved one.

The offerings in Scripture functioned in a similar way. A person's sinful acts, their inherent sinful state or a specific "unclean" state were all hindrances to a person's relationship with God, and these had to be dealt with before close fellowship with God could be enjoyed. The presentation of a specific offering symbolised the point at which a person's relationship with God stood.

For instance, a person could not present a completion offering before making a purification offering, if there was a matter of impurity yet to be addressed. A tribute offering was not to be offered if there was still a need for a reparation offering and compensation to be made, and so on. This progression of offerings, symbolising a person gradually "moving closer" to God and being fully in fellowship with Him, may be set out in the following way:

The Offerings in Sequence

A process of acceptance and fellowship

(1) Reparation offering or Purification offering

Specific sins, compensation (if applicable) and issues of purification had to be dealt with and worked through; then ...

(2) Approach offering & Tribute offering

That still left the offence of man's general shortcomings and sinful nature to be atoned for, and the need to acknowledge God for all His provision; then ...

(3) Completion offerings

After the removal of any obstacles, fellowship with God could be fully enjoyed.

(1) Offerings relating to conditions or actions requiring atonement:

Firstly, offences caused by sinful actions or certain conditions deemed “unclean” were an obstacle to a person drawing near to God. These required dealing with. Some circumstances demanded that atonement be made via a purification- or reparation offering. If reparation for a specific offence against the Lord’s holy things or one’s neighbour was required, the offended party was to be compensated, and the appropriate reparation offering presented to God. Certain other sins or issues of purification before God had to be addressed and worked through via the applicable purification offering.

(2) Offerings relating to approaching God:

Next came a person’s approach to God. This was done by seeking to have one’s general shortcomings and sinful nature atoned for via the approach offering. Often accompanying that offering was the tribute offering, an offering of thanks and an acknowledgement of God’s superior state of being and holiness.

(3) Offerings relating to fellowship and devotion:

After any obstacles to fellowship had been covered, or “atoned for”, one’s relationship with God could be fully enjoyed. The different forms of completion offerings offered by those at peace with God ceremonially were accompanied by the offerer seeking to have certain requests granted, or by carrying out various gestures of devotion.

In Exodus 29, such a sequence of offerings was carried out at the ceremony consecrating the Levitical priests. A purification offering was presented (v.14b “sin offering”); then an approach offering (v.18 “burnt offering”), which would have been accompanied by a tribute offering; and finally, one of the completion offerings (v.28 “peace offerings”).

A similar sequence of offerings may be observed by reading the events of 2 Chronicles 29. Previous to this chapter is an account of the wayward king of Judah, King Ahaz, who had defiled the temple in Jerusalem by worshipping pagan idols there. After the death of Ahaz, the new king of Judah, Hezekiah, set about cleansing the temple and restoring the proper worship of Jehovah there. Once the pagan articles had been removed and various cleansing rituals were carried out, Hezekiah restored the proper temple worship by way of several ceremonies, including the presentation of some of the offerings we are considering in this section of our study. The following is a rather simplistic summary of these events, but note the order in which the offerings were presented: first, the purification offering (v.23); then the approach offering which would have been accompanied by the tribute offering (v.27); after which, completion offerings could be brought (v.35).

In each instance, the obstacles to fellowship needed to be dealt with first, before true fellowship with God might be enjoyed and the ministry of the sanctuary could commence.

Interestingly, there are no recorded instances of the reparation offering being presented in conjunction with other offerings, such as in the examples just given. There do not seem to be

any suggestions in Scripture providing a reason for this. Perhaps it was because time to compensate the injured party may have been needed before one was in an appropriate state of cleanliness to “progress” further through the offerings sequence. However, without much to go on, it may be best to observe this phenomenon and place it amongst those many laws and practices for which there is no further explanation given.

Not Merely Ritualistic

Observing the regulations God had set forth in the order they were to be carried out, was important so that the symbolism and type teaching was not compromised. This was true from the earliest time when sacrifices began to be offered, but it was especially so under the Mosaic Law. Remember, however, that this was only part of the process. An attitude of genuine worship and humility accompanying all the offerings was essential (see Chapter 3, Principle No.4). The correct actions were required in the prescribed sequence, but if God was to accept a person’s sacrificial offering, they had to be performed by the offerer with sincerity of heart and intent.

Part C: Offerings Procedures

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Chapter 11: Offerings Before and After Sinai

Offerings and sacrifices have been part of God's dealings with mankind from the earliest times. Adam and Eve were clothed with the skins of slain animals (Genesis 3:21). Elsewhere in Genesis we read of Cain and Abel (4:3-7), Noah (8:20), Abraham (12:7, 8; 13:18), Isaac (26:25) and Jacob (33:20; 35:7) each constructing altars and offering sacrifices to God. However, major differences were introduced when the Mosaic Law was given to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai commencing at Exodus chapter 19, around 1400-1500 B.C.

In this section, we will compare how offerings were presented before the time of the Mosaic Law, with how they were later offered under the Law. The Law was complex, and there are some exceptions to the following summaries, but the guidelines below should serve as an adequate overview.

In General

Before the Mosaic Law: The approach-, tribute-, completion- and purification offerings were each practised, but these were irregular in timing and somewhat informal regarding how some of the rites performed.

Under the Mosaic Law: From Exodus chapter 19 onwards, everything about Israel's worship of God began to change. Israelites now had a specific place to worship (i.e. the sanctuary - Exodus ch.25-40), they had the specifically appointed Levitical priesthood to assist in that worship (Exodus ch.28, 29; Leviticus ch.8-10), and there were specified details written down regulating how offerings to God should and shouldn't be made (Leviticus ch.1-7)

Why

Before the Mosaic Law: Approach-, tribute-, completion- and purification offerings were presented to God, for the reasons discussed in Chapters 5 to 10, but with some irregularities. There seems to have been a general understanding of their purposes. The reparation offering does not appear in Scripture before the Mosaic Law was given.

Under the Mosaic Law: Approach-, tribute-, completion- and purification and now also reparation offerings were presented to God. These were often scheduled to be presented upon specific occasions, and under particular circumstances. E.g. Leviticus ch.12-16; Numbers ch.28, 29.

Who (nationally)

Before the Mosaic Law: People presented offerings on behalf of themselves, their household or their community. Israel was either not yet formed as a nation, or was still in its infancy.

Under the Mosaic Law: The regulations set out in Leviticus ch.1-7, Numbers 28 & 29, etc. as part of the Law applied only to the nation of Israel. They did not apply to Gentiles, as God was dealing with mankind specifically through His one chosen nation.

Who (personally)

Before the Mosaic Law: The head of the household took on a priestly role as mediator between God and man; e.g. Noah (Genesis 8:20) and Job (Job 1:5).

Under the Mosaic Law: Whether a man was a ruler, priest or commoner, each always presented their offerings assisted by a “Levitical” priest (a descendant of Aaron from the Israelite tribe of Levi) who now acted as the mediator between God and His people. The head of an Israelite household still presented offerings representing himself and/or his family, but now the assistance of an appointed Levitical priest was required (e.g. Leviticus 6:8-7:21). This aspect is discussed further in Chapter 12 - “Classes of the Levitical Offerings”.

How

Before the Mosaic Law: There were no written instructions on how offerings were to be made, and the details are few when they are recorded.

Under the Mosaic Law: Many specific instructions were written and recorded, detailing the methods of slaying an animal, dividing its portions, offering it via the Levitical priesthood, etc. Offerings under the Law were highly prescribed and regulated in minute detail as to how, when, where and with what substances. These laws are mainly set out in Leviticus chapters 1-7 and Numbers chapters 28 and 29.

When

Before the Mosaic Law: No specified times or occasions were prescribed. Broadly speaking, these were irregular.

Under the Mosaic Law: Regular and specified times were prescribed. There were daily, weekly, monthly and annual offering times, as well as those that were irregular and occasional. Again, these are largely detailed in Leviticus chapters 1-7 and Numbers chapters 28 and 29.

Where

Before the Mosaic Law: Offerings were presented in a wide variety of locations, often not at the same place. A platform called an altar was usually constructed, and the items to be

offered to God were placed upon it. Altars were made variously from a range of materials such as earth or stone and were of differing dimensions.

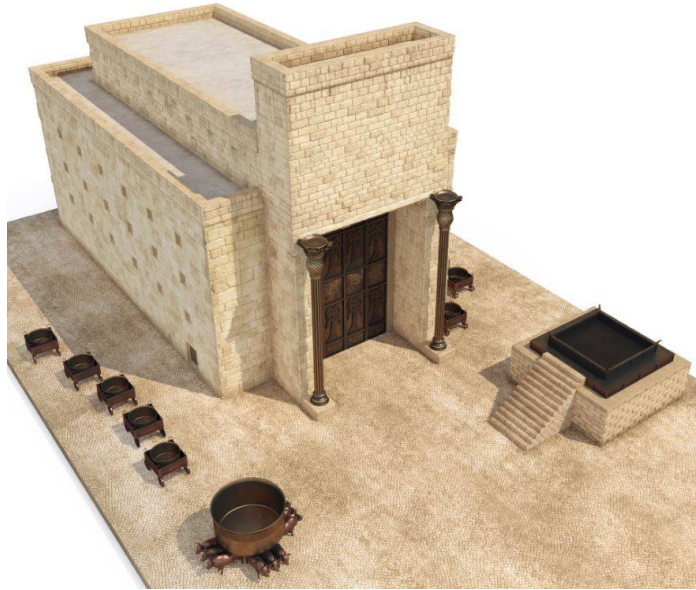


Pagan stone altar, with loaf of bread offering.
This is similar to some of the altars of earliest Bible times.

Under the Mosaic Law: Once the Law was ratified (Exodus 24:4-8) and the tabernacle with its furnishings had been constructed, offerings were thence to be presented at the designated altar within the sanctuary enclosure only (e.g. Exodus 29:10-12; Leviticus 1:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:11, 13, 14). The altar was crafted according to divinely revealed dimensions and patterns, the tabernacle's altar being portable and much smaller than that of the temples' altars that came after it. The altar of the tabernacle was constructed of sturdy acacia wood and covered with either bronze or copper, not "brass" as the KJV describes it (brass, an alloy of copper and tin, didn't exist at that time). The altar of the temple was also constructed mainly from bronze or copper, but probably sat atop a tall brick platform (see Exodus 27:1-8; 2 Chronicles 4:1). Sacrificial offerings were only carried out while Israel had a sanctuary in her midst. Hence, no offerings were presented for 70 years after the first Jerusalem temple was destroyed (c.586 B.C.), until the second temple was erected and dedicated (c. 516 B.C.); nor have there been any sacrifices offered by God-worshipping Israelites since the second temple was destroyed about 2000 years ago in 70 A.D.



Replica of the tabernacle's "portable" altar (Timna Park, Israel).



Computer generated model of the first Jerusalem temple, featuring a larger and more permanent altar (at right of picture).

Summary

Overall, it may be observed that the methods, location and timing of the offerings before the Mosaic Law were somewhat spasmodic, with many variables. Conversely, under the Law, minute regulations about every aspect were prescribed and recorded in the Law, mainly in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. In some instances before Sinai, we know that God specified particular locations regarding certain offerings, but these seem to be in the minority, and the few specifics we do have are relatively light on information compared to the detailed prescriptions of the Law.

Chapter 12: Classes of the Levitical Offerings

Having noted, in Chapters 4 to 9, some of the different animal- and grain-based offerings presented to God before and after Sinai, we now turn our attention to some further classifications of those offerings under the Law given to the nation of Israel.

Offerings of Varying Status

Those which were presented by Israelites under the Mosaic Law are often called Levitical offerings by theologians. There are two reasons for this title. Firstly, most of the regulations concerning such offerings are found in the book of Leviticus. Secondly, the offerings were presented to God via the priesthood, i.e. the priests or mediators between God and His people who came from the Israelite tribe of Levi. Each offering had to be presented with the assistance of at least one priest. No person who was not a priest was permitted to even touch the altar, let alone place their offering upon it.

Regulations pertaining to the Levitical offerings were only applicable to Israelites, and really had no relevance to Gentiles. This is important to understand because the offerings formed part of the Mosaic Law - a law that separated Israel from the surrounding nations (Exodus 19:5, 6; Deuteronomy 26:16-19).



Offerings were variously presented at **official, national, tribal** and **personal** levels, depending on the offerer's status within the nation of Israel. In this chapter is set out a basic categorisation of the Levitical offerings, based on who was making the offering, and on behalf of what class of person it was being made. It should be noted that there are some offerings mentioned in the Scriptures after the giving of the Law which do not fall neatly into these categories, so the following is a general guide only.

TYPE	OFFERED BY / ON BEHALF OF	OCCASION	EXAMPLES
OFFICIAL	Offered by the priesthood or ruler ... on behalf of the priesthood, and rulers.	Special occasions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon the consecration of priests, and the coronation of rulers. • The Day of Atonement. 	Exodus 29:1-34 Leviticus chs. 8 & 9 16:32-34 1 Samuel 11:15
NATIONAL	Offered by the priesthood ... on behalf of the nation of Israel as a whole.	Regular occasions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily, weekly, monthly, annually, and as part of the annual festivals. Irregular occasions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At significant events, or a time of repentance. 	Exodus 29:38-46 Leviticus 23 Numbers 28 & 29 2 Chronicles 29:21-36; 33:16
TRIBAL (rare)	Offered by tribal leaders in conjunction with the priesthood ... on behalf of each Israelite tribe.	Rare special occasions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the construction and dedication of the sanctuary for its ministry. 	Numbers ch.7 1 Chronicles 29:6-9 2 Chronicles 35:8,9 (cp. Ezra 1:5; 2:68)
PERSONAL	Offered by commoners in conjunction with the priesthood ... on behalf of individuals and their households.	Irregular occasions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent upon the timing of individual events and circumstances. 	Leviticus chs. 1 to 7; 12-15

Official Offerings

Offered by: The priesthood.

On behalf of: Official representatives of the people, namely the priesthood and rulers of Israel.

Occasions: Official offerings took place on special occasions such as at the consecration of priests (Exodus 29:1-34; Leviticus chs. 8 & 9), the coronation of rulers (1 Samuel 11:15), and the part of the Day of Atonement ritual seeking atonement for the priesthood (Leviticus 16:3-13, 33).

Comments: These were made on behalf of the “officials” of Israel, such as the king and members of the priesthood. Both the priests and the rulers of Israel had to be in a right state before God if they were to be deemed suitable for service and ministry. They were God’s representatives to the people, and representatives of the people to God.

National Offerings

Offered by: The priesthood.

On behalf of: The nation of Israel as a whole.

Occasions: Regular offerings were made on behalf of the nation daily (Numbers 28:1-8), weekly (Numbers 28:9,10), monthly (Numbers 28:11-15), annually (Numbers 29:1-6), and as part of each of the annual festivals (Numbers 28:16-29:39; Leviticus 23). Outside of this routine, presentations of offerings sometimes took place at times of national repentance (2 Chronicles 29:21-36; 33:16), or during other occasions of significance, such as when the ark was placed inside the newly constructed temple for the first time (1 Kings 8:4-6).

Comments: National offerings were regimented, and very, very frequent! The daily offerings, were presented by the priests on behalf of the nation, morning and evening, every day of the year. The Lord said of these acts that He would be “meeting” with the Israelites (Exodus 29:42, 43). The presentation of approach offerings, which were accompanied by tribute offerings (Numbers 28:31), displayed at a national level an acknowledgement of God’s superiority and the Israelites’ inherent sinful nature in comparison, as well as being an offering of thanks to God, a gesture of respect to Him, a show of submission to Him, and recognition that they owed their existence and every possession to God’s provision.

Tribal Offerings

Offered by: Tribal leaders, in conjunction with the priesthood.

On behalf of: Each Israelite tribe.

Occasions: These were presented on rare and special occasions only. There were no offerings at a tribal level that were part of a regular routine.

Comments: This is the least common class of offering, and there are not many occasions recorded in the Bible at which such offerings took place. When presented, representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel offered on behalf of the people within their tribe. Such occasions include the dedication of the sanctuary for its ministry (Numbers ch.7; 2 Chronicles 35:8, 9).

Personal Offerings

Offered by: Commoners, in conjunction with the priesthood.

On behalf of: Individual commoners and their households.

Occasions: Personal offerings were brought at irregular occasions, dependent upon the timing of events, and a family's or individual's circumstances.

Comments: Individual reasons for presenting offerings varied so widely that it is impossible to cover every circumstance in this summary. Chapters 4 to 10 of this book give an overview of some of the reasons why people brought offerings to be presented and sacrificed.

Mandatory and Voluntary Offerings

So far in this chapter, we have looked at the different classes of offering based on a person's status within the nation of Israel. Yet, there is a method of more broadly categorising the offerings. This involves distinguishing those that were voluntary from those that were mandatory; however, it is often difficult to tell which offerings were compulsory and which were not.

To be allowed to be part of the Israelite community and engage in worship at the sanctuary, a person had to be ceremonially clean before God. In such instances, the reparation and purification offerings were often compulsory, and accompanied by other requirements.

Reparation Offering - "the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses." (Leviticus 6:7)

Purification Offering - “the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him.” (Leviticus 4:26)

Assuming that a person was clean from impurity (either from sin or some other unclean circumstance), it was still necessary to have one’s inherent sin covered in order to approach God and be accepted by Him. In this sense, the approach offering was mandatory. If and when the approach offering was presented, it had to be accompanied by a tribute offering; this was also mandatory.

Approach and Tribute Offerings - “he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering [i.e. approach offering], and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.” (Leviticus 1:4).

However, the reasons for a commoner presenting an approach offering (and thus, a tribute offering also) in the first place seem somewhat arbitrary, and are not clearly prescribed in the Law. There are some differences between the English Bible versions that do little to settle this matter. Concerning the approach offering, about half of the translations of Leviticus 1:3 tell us that this may be offered from one’s “free will”, whilst the other half do not include any such phrase and actually imply obligation. Linguists are divided on how some of the relevant Hebrew words should be translated. For example, compare two different translations of the same verse:

He shall offer it of his own **free will** at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD (Leviticus 1:3 NKJV)

You **must** present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting **so that it will be acceptable** to the LORD (Leviticus 1:3 NIV)

The various forms of the completion offerings also had strict regulations to be adhered to, but were certainly less obligatory in nature:

Completion Offerings - “This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to the LORD: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall [etc.] ... But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall [etc.]” (Leviticus 7:11, 12, 16)

When the completion offerings were made, they had to be performed strictly to the letter of the Law; yet there were relatively few circumstances under which a person was obliged to present one of these. Certain completion offerings became compulsory if a person had taken a Nazirite vow (Numbers ch.6). Essentially, this was a vow taken by a man or woman who, although not a Levite, wished to serve God in some more formal and dedicated capacity. When the time came to be released from that vow, that person underwent several rituals, including presenting completion offerings (Numbers 6:13-20). This ritual is referred to in Acts 21:17-24, when Paul helped four men from Jerusalem pay for the process involved in concluding such a vow; the expenses he paid most likely included the cost of the animals to be sacrificed.

As a general rule, the offerings that were made regularly or on specific occasions or under specific circumstances were mandatory; those that were less regulated as to their timing were voluntary. However, there are many exceptions to this rule, and it is safer to treat each on a case-by-case basis by observing the context when reading about an offering in an attempt to determine whether it was voluntary or mandatory.

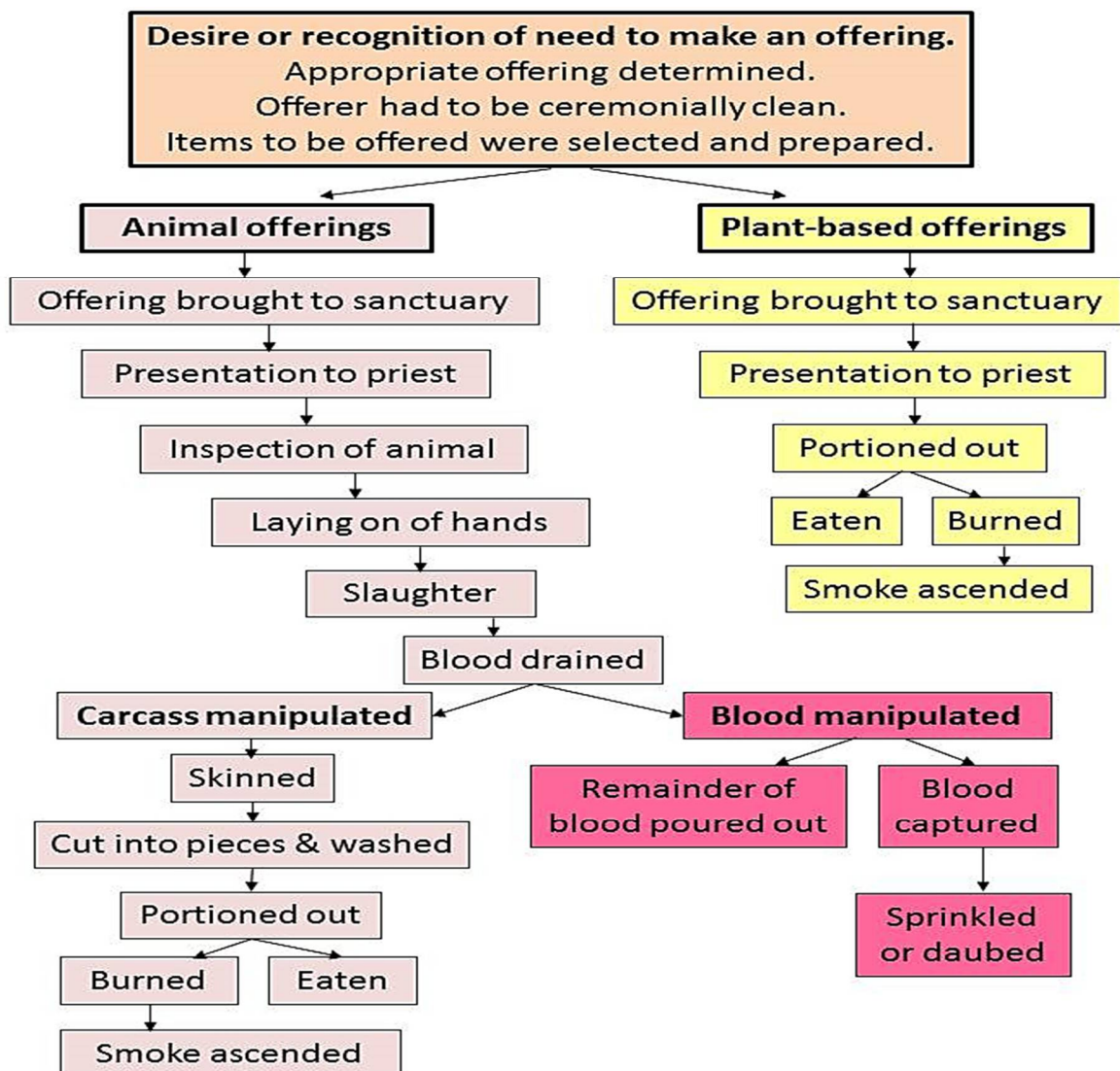
Whether obligatory or of one's free will; whether personal, official, national or tribal - all offerings were to be presented according to the set regulations, and with a spirit of sincerity for them to be acceptable to God. What exact processes were involved is the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter 13: The Levitical Offering Process

Under the Mosaic Law, each offering had its own regulations, often with variants depending on a person's status and circumstance. It is easy to become overwhelmed with the plethora of minute details and nuances, so we shall not attempt to explore every part of the process of each Levitical offering. Nevertheless, there were some features common to most offering procedures, and it is worth taking a broad look at these to get a sense of what was most commonly involved.

Offering Procedures Under the Mosaic Law

This chapter is set out in the following way. After noting the initial steps of the offering process, several procedures specifically pertaining to the sacrifice of an animal will be considered, followed by those specific to the presentation of a grain-based item. The diagram below is a flow chart illustrating the sequence of events for the offering process:



Let us now elaborate on some of the processes in that diagram.

Initial steps:

- Firstly, the offerer had to have the desire to make an offering or recognise the need of such. If there was no desire or recognition of need, any offering made would be meaningless.
- Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate offering was then determined: reparation offering, purification offering, approach offering, tribute offering, or one of the varieties of completion offering.
- Before the next step could take place, the offerer needed to be ceremonially clean. If a person was not considered to be “clean”, they were not permitted to even enter the sanctuary enclosure, let alone come near to the altar to present a sacrifice. Some of the laws concerning the required state of cleanliness may be found in Leviticus chapters 11 to 15.
- Once a person was in a ceremonially clean state, they would then determine, select and prepare the particular items to be offered, such as a lamb, a baked loaf of bread, and so on.

After this point, the process varied, depending on whether the item selected was **an animal** or was a **plant-based** item. We shall look at each of these in turn.

Animal Offerings:

If the offering appropriate to the occasion included the sacrifice of an animal, a number of steps were followed. As an introduction to the kinds of procedures involved, Leviticus 1:3-9 is presented below in an itemised form. Leviticus 1 gives us a good idea of what took place in such instances. However, the reader should note that this passage refers specifically to the approach offering, and some of the details vary slightly for each of the other offerings, as shown in the chart under “Levitical Sacrificial Procedures for the Different Offerings” later in this chapter. Leviticus 1:3-9 reads:

If his offering is [an approach offering] of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish;

he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. *[or perhaps: “You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD.” See comments in the previous chapter of this book.]*

Then he shall put his hand on the head of the [approach offering], and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

He shall kill the bull before the LORD;

and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

And he shall skin the [approach offering]

and cut it into its pieces.

The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire.

Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar;

but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water.

And the priest shall burn all on the altar as [an approach offering], an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. (Leviticus 1:3-9)

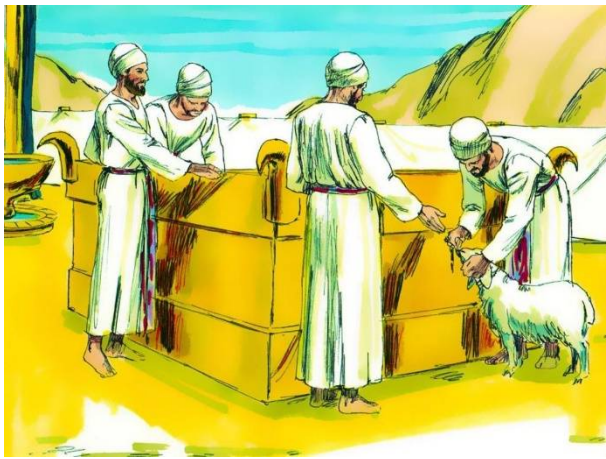
Thus, the steps involved were these:

- The animal was brought to the sanctuary and presented to the officiating priest. Acceptable animals were live cattle, sheep, goats, pigeons and turtledoves; wild animals were not suitable, neither were animals already dead. Most animals prescribed were approximately one year old, around the time they would begin to be productive and therefore be at their most valuable. Males were of greater monetary value because they could potentially father a greater number of offspring; however, some offering laws specifically prescribe a female animal for reasons not always explained in Scripture. The priest would inspect the creature to ensure that it was without blemish and that it met the criteria for the specific offering being made. The offerer then placed his hands on the head of the beast, before killing it by slitting its throat and draining the blood out. A slightly varied method was employed in the slaying of birds, due to their smaller size and different anatomy. Killing of the animal was quick, to ensure a minimum of trauma to the victim and the ease of capturing its blood. The carcass and the blood were then dealt with (the proper term is “manipulated”) in different ways.
- The carcass was skinned. The flesh was cut into pieces and washed. Depending on the offering type, portions of the meat



Slaughtered sheep being drained of its blood.

were variously eaten by the offerer, the priesthood or totally consumed by fire. In all flesh offerings, at least some of the animal was incinerated. Sometimes, a portion was lifted up (“waved” or “heaved”) before being burned or eaten. When incineration took place on the altar (which was the case for most flesh offerings), the smoke ascended and was sometimes said to be an aroma pleasing to God.



Levitical priests offering sacrifices on the altar. Left: At the tabernacle in the wilderness. Right: At the first Jerusalem temple.

Sweet Publishing/FreeBibleimages.org

- The blood that was drained was not usually incinerated. Sometimes it was simply poured out onto the ground, or at the base of the altar. At other times, it was captured in a receptacle and used for sprinkling on certain items, such as the horns of the altar. On occasions, it was even daubed on priests (e.g. Leviticus 1:5; Exodus 29:12, 20, 21).

Many people are not comfortable with reading these processes, regarding them to be distastefully gory, and the act of killing an innocent animal as cruel or unnecessary. However, we should bear in mind that such sacrifices were commanded by God Himself, and He had His reasons. If we are to understand the significance of Biblical offerings and sacrifices, we must come to terms with the fact that **the Levitical offering system involved death and blood in huge quantities on a regular basis**. Suffice it to say that millions of animals were killed as part of the Levitical sacrifices. Animal sacrifices weren't neat or tidy processes; much blood was shed, it probably smelt pretty awful at times, there was great loss of life involved, and all of this was frequent and regular practice. It becomes apparent that sections of Israel's ancient sanctuary more closely resembled an abattoir than the pristine and bloodless places of worship that we are more used to seeing illustrated in books.

Whilst the flesh of an animal was incinerated or portioned out to various people, the blood was destined for other fates. During the approach- and completion offerings, the blood was splashed onto the side of the sacrificial altar (Leviticus 1:5, 11, 15; 3:2, 8 13). Depending on the ceremony, blood was variously daubed on priests (Exodus 29:20, 21), dabbed onto the horns of the sacrificial altar or the golden altar of incense (Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34), sprinkled onto the covering lid of the ark or before the veil (Leviticus 4:6, 17; 16:14, 15), and

more. Through these processes, much blood would have pooled on the ground of the tabernacle compound or the floor of the temple. Indeed, most blood from the sacrificed beast of the purification offering was actually required to be poured out at the base of the altar (Leviticus 4:5-7, 16-18, 25, 30, 34; 5:9)

Let us consider the sheer volume of blood that was shed. The animals most commonly slain for the Levitical offerings were bulls, goats, sheep, pigeons and doves (e.g. Leviticus 1:3, 10, 14). Each of these animals hold varying amounts of blood. Within each species, there are many variables to be taken into consideration, including age, weight, breed, etc., but the following table will serve as a guide to the approximate amount of blood in each of these animals in their adult stage:

How much blood was in each of the sacrificial animals?

Bull: 30 litres
Goat: 4-5 litres
Sheep: 4 litres
Pigeon/dove: 90 ml

Excluding the regular daily offerings and weekly sabbaths, at least 200 animals were slain during the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles, including 70 bulls (Numbers 29:12-38). The bulls alone would have produced in excess of 200 litres of blood and the remaining animals about 300 litres. These are conservative estimates, but the volume of blood was still huge. The priests had to deal with draining over 500 litres of blood in a relatively small area. These numbers may well have tripled during the Passover, when hundreds of families would have each brought a lamb to the sanctuary to be slain (Deuteronomy 16:5, 6). Given the volumes of blood shed, what happened to it all?

Scripture does not provide an answer to this question. Whilst evidence pointing to blood drainage systems for the tabernacle and “Solomon’s Temple” is questionable, archaeological discoveries and ancient texts strongly testify to the existence of an intricate drainage system that was built into the foundations of “Herod’s Temple” (see *The Letter of Aristeas* 88-91; *Mishnah Middot* 3:2-3; *Mishnah Yoma* 5:6; *Talmud Sukkah* 49a). There was a channel at the south-western corner of the stone altar of sacrifice, which funnelled excess blood through a series of catacombs beneath the temple, and drained into the Kidron Valley below. A water supply to the temple mount assisted in flushing the water away.

On a personal note, I was brought up as a city boy, and had little exposure to the slaughter of animals, much less than those brought up in a rural setting might have had. Having read of these offerings in Scripture, my appreciation of what it meant to kill and sacrifice an animal increased markedly after viewing some visual footage showing modern-day acts of sacrificing bulls, goats, lambs, etc., mostly as part of Hindu or Muslim worship practice. Though still quite different, the closest thing to ancient Biblical sacrificial practice is perhaps the annual Passover ceremony of the Samaritan communities living in Israel today (to be distinguished from Orthodox Jews, who do not practise sacrifices). The interested reader will find a lot of material posted on internet video sites such as “YouTube”, but be warned, some

of it is rather graphic and can be distressing in nature. It is not recommended that children view this footage without adult supervision.

I do not condone the practices of people who offer such sacrifices today, but visually experiencing these may give the Bible student a better understanding of what sacrifice often looked like in ancient times, since it is never witnessed amongst modern Christian communities. Before seeing such footage, I had a rather stylised and sterile idea of this process, and speaking with some of my friends, it became evident that they also had similar ideas. Since viewing however, there is a greater awareness of the practical side of sacrificing



A slaughtered sheep such as this was a common sight at the sanctuary.

- the difficulty of handling and slaughtering a large animal such as a bull, the blood that is shed, the messiness, the smell, and so on - that I would not otherwise have had. Viewed discerningly, with the aim of educating oneself about these things, I believe that such visual footage will assist the serious Bible student.

We have only looked at the most common sacrificial processes in this section. Note that the procedures of the reparation offering, purification offering, approach offering, and completion offerings were all slightly different from each other. The particular details of each may be found in Leviticus 1:1-17, 3:1-6:13; 6:24-7:38.

Plant-based Offerings:

If the offering appropriate to the occasion did not include the sacrifice of an animal, but was a grain-based food, different processes applied. Leviticus 2 gives some details about the tribute offering, an offering that, under the Mosaic Law, was plant-based. Extracts from that chapter are set out below:

When anyone offers a [tribute] offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. He shall bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. The rest of the [tribute] shall be Aaron's and his sons. It is most holy of the offerings to the LORD made by fire. (Leviticus 2:1-3)

And if you bring as an offering a [tribute] baked in the oven, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil. But if your offering is a [tribute] baked in a pan, it shall be of fine flour, unleavened, mixed with oil. ... If your offering is a [tribute] baked in a covered pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil ... If you offer a [tribute] of your firstfruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the [tribute] of your firstfruits green heads of grain roasted on the fire, grain beaten from full heads ... (Leviticus 2:4, 5, 7, 14)

Thus, the steps involved were these:

- The offering, usually an offering of grain that had been fried or baked into a cake or loaf of bread, accompanied by a small amount of oil, frankincense and salt, was presented to the officiating priest. The “fine” flour used (Leviticus 2:1) was to be fine in regard to particle size, and of the best quality.
- It was then portioned out, with most of it going to the priesthood for them to eat, whilst a smaller portion was burned on the altar.

Other regulations concerning this may be found in Leviticus 6:14-23.



Matzah (or matzo), an unleavened flatbread. A form of offering that was plant-based.

Further notes about animal and plant-based offerings:

Any items – animal or grain based – placed upon the altar would ultimately be consumed by fire. Rather than being “cooked”, they were completely incinerated. Once upon the altar, it was a point of no return for that portion of an offering.

It is a common misconception that any acceptable offering placed upon an altar in Bible times was then consumed by fire sent from heaven, thus signifying God’s approval of it. This was only true in rare and special circumstances, such as the inaugural usages of the altar in the tabernacle and first temple (Leviticus 9:24; 2 Chronicles 7:1 cp. 1 Chronicles 21:26; 1 Kings 18:20-39). However, this was not at all the norm. Most commonly, the fire of the altar was to be kept alive by the priests at all times (Leviticus 6:12, 13) and it was this fire that then consumed a person’s offering.

A few other miscellaneous regulations of note applied to the presentation of offerings, and are listed here in no particular order:

- Salt was always added to both the animal and grain offerings (Leviticus 2:13; cp. Ezekiel 43:24).
- Accompanying some offerings was the ceremonial pouring of liquid, usually wine (e.g. Exodus 29:40, 41; Leviticus 23:13). These were known as libations, and are often translated as “drink offerings”, though these were rarely, if ever, consumed as a drink by the offerers. The relevant Hebrew words *neseq* (noun) and *nasak* (verb) really related

more to pouring, so it is better to think of these as simply liquid offerings, or even “poured” offerings. Relatively few details are given about these in Scripture.

- Leaven was never to be burned on the altar (Leviticus 2:11).
- People were never to eat the blood or the fat of an animal. This injunction applied both to meat eaten as part of an offering ceremony as well as to the consumption of meat in a non-offering setting (Leviticus 3:17; 7:24-27). Some commentators believe that the “fat” (Hebrew: *helev*) refers only to fat surrounding some of the internal organs of the animal, and not the fat closer to the skin.
- Portions of offerings to be eaten by the priesthood were regarded as “most holy” (Leviticus 2:10; 6:17, 29; 7:6). Other portions associated with completion offerings and consumed by commoners appear to have been deemed as having a lesser sanctity - still holy, but not quite as holy as the priests’ portions. Just as the sanctuary had a “holy” section and a “most holy” section (Exodus 26:33), God designated that some offerings portions differed in this manner also.
- Sometimes, a portion of an offering was ceremonially lifted up (“waved” or “heaved”) to God before being burned or eaten. Most often, portions that were waved or heaved ended up being eaten by the priesthood, and not incinerated on the altar (e.g. Leviticus 7:30b).
- During the exodus journey through the wilderness, any meat eaten was first to be offered at the sanctuary. This applied to all livestock. For the commoner, consumption was only possible after the presentation of a completion offering:

Whatever man of the house of Israel who kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, the guilt of bloodshed shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people, to the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer them as [completion] offerings to the LORD. And the priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to the LORD. (Leviticus 17:3-6)

- As the Israelites were nearing Canaan, and they were about to disperse throughout the promised land, that earlier law was superseded by the following law permitting the consumption of meat outside of an offering context:

When the LORD your God enlarges your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘Let me eat meat,’ because you long to eat meat, you may eat as much meat as your heart desires. If the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name [i.e. the sanctuary] is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from your

flock which the LORD has given you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your gates as much as your heart desires. (Deuteronomy 12:20, 21)

Levitical Sacrificial Procedures for the Different Offerings

Below is a brief summary of the different procedures concerning the five main offering types (variant manipulations of an animal's blood under different circumstances are not included). The details applied when the offerer was a commoner, so some minor variations came into play when the offerings were presented by the priesthood on behalf of the nation, or on behalf of the priesthood.

Offering Title(s) and Refs.	The Offering Itself	The Offerer's Work	The Priest's Work	God's Portion	Priest's Portion	Offerer's Portion
Approach Offering (Burnt Offering) Leviticus Ch.1; 6:8-13	A bull, or a sheep, or a goat, or turtle doves, or young pigeons – according to the ability of the offerer. If of the herd or flock, one year old without blemish.	He took the animal to the sanctuary, laid his hand on it, slew it, skinned it, cut it into pieces, washed the parts and gave it to the priest. When the offering was a bird, he handed it to the priest.	He caught the blood, sprinkled it around the altar and placed the parts in order on the altar, upon which it was incinerated by the fire.	The whole animal, except for the skin.	The skin of the animal.	Nothing.

Offering Title(s) and Refs.	The Offering Itself	The Offerer's Work	The Priest's Work	God's Portion	Priest's Portion	Offerer's Portion
Tribute Offering (Grain Offering) Leviticus Ch.2; 6:14-23	Non-flesh. Unbaked flour ground fine, or baked cakes, or green ears of corn parched or roasted. To be mixed with oil, salt, sprinkled with frankincense, and to contain no leaven or honey.	He took the offering to the sanctuary. The priest took over from here on.	He threw a handful of the offering, and all of the frankincense, onto the altar fire.	A handful of the offering and the frankincense.	The remainder of the offering.	Nothing.

Offering Title(s) and Refs.	The Offering Itself	The Offerer's Work	The Priest's Work	God's Portion	Priest's Portion	Offerer's Portion
Completion Offering (Peace Offering or Fellowship Offering) Leviticus Ch.3; 6:11-36	A bull, lamb or goat. Male or female. No doves or pigeons as they would be too small to share amongst the three parties.	He led the offering to the sanctuary, laid his hand upon it, killed it, opened it, took out the fat, some membrane and the kidneys, and gave them to the priest to be burned.	He caught the blood, sprinkled it around the altar and waved the breast, and right thigh (KJV: "right shoulder") before the Lord.	The fatty portions, etc.	Breast, and right thigh (KJV: "right shoulder") of animal.	That which remained from what was not incinerated on the altar or given to the officiating priest.

Offering Title(s) and Refs.	The Offering Itself	The Offerer's Work	The Priest's Work	God's Portion	Priest's Portion	Offerer's Portion
Purification Offering (Sin Offering) Leviticus 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30	A bull or goat (male or female) or lamb, depending on the offerer's position within the nation.	He led the offering to the sanctuary, laid his hand upon it, killed it and opened it. He took out the fat, some membrane and the kidneys, and gave them to the priest to be burned.	He caught and sprinkled the blood in one of the prescribed ways, depending on the offerer's position within the nation. He also handled the animal's slaughter and incineration.	The fatty portions, etc. If the offering was made by a member of the priesthood or the nation as a whole, the rest of the animal was also to be burned in a clean place outside the camp.	Nothing, if it was offered for a member of the priesthood or the nation as a whole. Otherwise that which was not burned could be eaten.	Nothing.

Offering Title(s) and Refs.	The Offering Itself	The Offerer's Work	The Priest's Work	God's Portion	Priest's Portion	Offerer's Portion
Reparation Offering (Trespass Offering or Guilt Offering) Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10	A ram, as well as its valuation in money plus 20%.	He led the offering to the sanctuary, laid his hand upon it, killed it, opened it, took out the fat, some membrane and the kidneys, and gave them to the priest to be burned. Payment of monetary compensation.	He caught and sprinkled the blood around the altar and handled the animal's slaughter.	The fatty portions, etc., and that which was burned on the altar.	That which was not burned on the altar was for the priesthood. The money was given to the priesthood to administer.	Nothing.

Procedures for the purification- and reparation offerings are similar, yet distinct, as seen by comparing the two charts on the following pages:

Purification offering procedures

Numbers in (brackets) are all references from Leviticus.

<u>Guilty Party or Unclean Party:</u>	<i>High Priest</i>	<i>Whole Nation</i>	<i>One of Israel's leaders</i>	<i>Commoner</i>
<u>Item offered:</u>	Young bull (4:3)	Young bull (4:14)	Male goat (4:23)	Female goat or lamb (4:27,32) If poor: two birds (5:7) If very poor: 2kg flour (5:11)
<u>Offered by:</u>	High priest (4:4)	Elders (4:15)	That particular leader (4:24)	The commoner (4:29,33)
<u>Blood:</u>	<p>Some of the blood was taken into the sanctuary and sprinkled seven times in front of the veil.</p> <p>Some of the blood was put onto the horns of the <u>golden altar of incense</u> within the sanctuary building.</p> <p>The rest of the blood was poured out at the base of the copper altar of sacrifice outside the sanctuary building.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">-</p> <p>Some of the blood was put onto the horns of the <u>copper altar of sacrifice</u> outside the sanctuary building.</p> <p>The rest of the blood was poured out at the base of the copper altar of sacrifice outside the sanctuary building.</p> <p>(No blood included if offering was flour.)</p>	
	(4:5-7)	(4:17,18)	(4:25)	(4:30,34)
<u>Portions of the Offering:</u>	Fatty portions of animal were burned on the altar.			Fatty portions of animal, or a handful of flour, was burned on the altar.
	(4:8-10)	(4:20)	(4:26)	(4:31,35)
	Remainder of the bull was completely burned in a clean place far away from the sanctuary.		Remainder of the animal was eaten by the priest.	Remainder of the animal or flour was eaten by the priest.
	(4:11,12; 6:30)	(4:21; 6:30)	(6:24-29)	(6:24-29)

Reparation offering procedures

Numbers in (brackets) are all references from Leviticus.

<u>Guilty Party or Unclean Party:</u>	<i>The whole nation, or a person of any status</i>
<u>Item offered:</u>	Ram, i.e. male sheep plus one-fifth of its value in money (5:14-16,18; 6:5,6)
<u>Offered by:</u>	A priest (5:16,18; 6:7)
<u>Blood:</u>	Some of the blood was put onto the horns of the <u>copper altar of sacrifice</u> outside the sanctuary building. Though not specified, the rest of the blood was probably poured out at the base of the copper altar of sacrifice outside the sanctuary building. (7:2,7)
<u>Portions of the Offering:</u>	Fatty portions of animal were burned on the altar. (7:3-5) Remainder of the animal was eaten by the priest. (7:6,7)

Instruction vs. History

Despite the detailed nature of the instructions surrounding sacrificial offering, it would be incorrect to think that each of these procedures was kept by all Israelites to the letter of the Law from the day they were given to Moses until the destruction of the temple in 70AD. Sadly, there were several lengthy periods in Israel's history of that timespan wherein the nation's worship practices were watered down, or when the people were not terribly faithful to the one true God at all.

Not long after the Israelites entered Canaan during the days of Joshua, adherence to the Law began to become somewhat spasmodic. It is best characterised by the phrase:

In those days there was no king in Israel; **everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** (Judges 17:6; also 21:25)

The period of the Judges saw much behaviour that had a tone of sacred worship about it, but was actually contrary to the stipulated word of God. For example, we read of some people “owning” their own personal priest (Judges 17:7-13), the ark not residing in the sanctuary (1 Samuel 7:1, 2), inappropriate eating of the completion offerings (1 Samuel 2:12-17), and so on. Many deeds of that period had the sound of religion about them, whilst being way off the mark of God’s standards and intentions.

For the rest of the Old Testament, periods of adherence to the Law (such as during most of King David’s reign, the reformations under Kings Hezekiah and Josiah, and the guidance of Ezra) were greatly outnumbered by periods of disobedience and careless sacrificial practice more based on ritual-for-ritual’s-sake than any expression of true worship of God. The Lord’s word to the people through Isaiah the prophet during the time of the divided kingdom typifies those more heart-rending phases of Israel’s history:

“Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, they have turned away ... To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. **“I have had enough of burnt offerings** of rams and the fat of fed cattle. **I do not delight** in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.” (Isaiah 1:4, 11)

One can hear the tone of despair in the word “Alas!” as God says of the very same ceremonies of offerings that were instituted by Himself, that He had “had enough” of them; not because of their frequency, but because of the inappropriate hearts of the worshippers presenting them. Such abhorrence was exemplified by King Ahaz who ordered a pagan altar to be built within the sanctuary compound with the priesthood’s approval (2 Kings 16:10-16), and King Manasseh’s sacrifices of children to the pagan god Molech (2 Kings 21:6 cp. Jeremiah 32:35). It was only a matter of time before the Lord would have the whole nation expelled from His land by the empires of Assyria and Babylon.

Upon returning from Babylonian exile, the Jews who occupied the land had done away with idolatry on the whole, and rebuilt the recently destroyed temple. Nevertheless, sacrificial practices were not perfect. The offering of substandard animals was obviously a recurring problem, as shown in Malachi’s prophecy written during that time:

A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’ You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the LORD is contemptible.’ And when you offer the

blind [animal] as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick [animal], is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably? says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:6-8)

Later, in New Testament times, pious Israelites in Judea and Galilee often confused what was God's written Law with the flawed "traditions of men" and treated them as if they were one and the same thing. Christ particularly reprimanded the Pharisees and scribes, two parties who stated a fervour for observing "the Law":

Laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ... you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition ... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. (Mark 7:8-13)

This serves as a reminder that God's people of faith in all eras have the potential to stray from truth, even in a culture of religious fervour and piety. Whilst proper sacrificial procedure seems to have been fairly closely followed in Judea during the Gospel and Acts eras, such "traditions" often intruded upon the sentiments of true worship. Hence, we find that the exact details of the offering ceremonies evolved over the centuries, not through new Spirit-inspired revelations, but via the practices of the priesthood. For instance, we discussed earlier that, in the original edicts of the Mosaic Law, the offerer was to kill the animal, dissect it, and wash the portions (Leviticus 1:5, 6, 9); however, by the time of Christ's day, these duties were all being carried out by the priests. Prayers and extra libations also became part of some ceremonies, as well as the singing of certain psalms, none of which were ever included in the original instructions of the Law. It is debatable whether music should or should not have been added, but the Lord Himself didn't seem to have a problem with the singing of hymns during the Passover ceremony (Matthew 26:30). The defining edicts about appropriate sacrificial practice seem to have been: (1) Adhere, at the very least, to the stated offerings laws; and (2) Present offerings to the one true God with sincerity of heart.

Several such variations became the norm over time, but it should be noted that, when presented in good faith, the most basic and common procedures discussed in this chapter largely remained the same throughout the centuries. See Chapter 3: "Core Principles Governing the Sacrifices" for more details.

From this point onwards, we will continue our studies based more upon the inspired regulations given by God Himself, and less on any extra-Biblical procedures that merely snuck in over time. On this basis, the question remains: what did all of these rather complex and specific rituals, as prescribed in the Law revealed to Moses, mean? This is the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter 14: Symbolism in the Levitical Offering Process

Having surveyed some of the rituals of the Levitical offering processes, the reader may naturally be led to ponder over what it all meant. Most modern-day Christians will be aware of parallels with Christ's great sacrifice, and some implications for the believer today; indeed, we will deliberate over these aspects further in Chapters 16 and 18 respectively.

It is at this point that I believe we will benefit from exercising a degree of patience. Before ascribing meanings to the offerings, which may in turn directly impact upon how we live our own lives today, great benefit will be gained by first asking an important question: What did the people of Bible times think they were doing when they carried out these observances? What significance did the ancient faithful think was attached to the ceremonial procedures of the offerings?

Bearing in mind that Christ did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17), we are unlikely to have any idea of what Christ fulfilled by His death on the cross if we do not know something of the Law. More specifically, people can make up all sorts of things about how Christ's death fulfilled the symbolism behind the various practices of the offering process, but Christians will make sounder conclusions if they first take the time to reflect upon what the offerers of old understood by them.

The Ancients' Understanding of the Procedures

The offering system formed a substantial part of the Mosaic Law, and the rituals were carried out by people who understood what they were doing, at least as far as their immediate actions were concerned. It is a mistake to think that the offerings were presented blindly by millions of people who, over many centuries, just shrugged their shoulders and supposed that these unusual procedures would eventually mean something to somebody. They may not have understood all that was eventually fulfilled in Christ, but the specific offerings with their regulations all had meanings attached to them, whether it was the seeking of forgiveness, the expression of thanks, or some other sentiment. They had an immediate relevance to the ancients who presented them, and those people were fully cognisant of this.

It is a matter for debate about whether every procedure in the offering process carried a greater symbolism; i.e. which actions were representative, and which were merely practical? For instance, in order for parts of an animal to be symbolically portioned out, the animal first had to be skinned; so, did the skinning represent some greater meaning or was it something that just had to be done so that other meanings could be represented? My own opinion is that not every aspect was necessarily symbolic; however, I admit that it is hard to be entirely conclusive about this.

The reasons behind many of the commands for following certain procedures were often not given by God in His Word; they were simply to be followed. The rationale may or may not have been much clearer in ancient times. For example, the reason behind an injunction

prohibiting the burning of honey on the altar (Leviticus 2:11) is never explained. It seems likely that this particular ritual had been associated with pagan worship in Egypt and so was to be avoided, but we cannot be certain of this. Often, we must accept that God wanted some ceremonial rite to be carried out in a particular way for His own undeclared purpose, and it is probably better to not speculate His motives when they are not spelled out clearly.

Nevertheless, the meanings behind some of the procedures are relatively plain, and we shall now consider just a selection of these by briefly addressing what the ancients thought they were doing by carrying out each of them.

Bringing the items to be offered into the sanctuary: Offerings to God were brought to the place where God was considered to have revealed His presence. Before the Law was given at Sinai, the offerings were presented and accepted in many different locations, often where God is said to have appeared to people (e.g. Genesis 12:7; 26:23-25; etc.). After Sinai, the designated place of presenting offerings was to be within the sanctuary, the area declared to be holy (Deuteronomy 12:13,14; Leviticus 17:3-9). Under the law this was a specifically determined location: “the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide” (Deuteronomy 12:11). Initially, this was the tabernacle; later, it was the temple in Jerusalem. It was here that God had declared Himself to be approachable: “There I will meet with the children of Israel.” (Exodus 29:42, 43).

The role of the priest: Previous to Sinai, the “priest” had been the head of the household or regional tribe, presenting offerings to God on behalf of his subordinates; for instance, Noah (Genesis 8:20) and Job (Job 1:4, 5) both fulfilled this role. After Sinai, the Levitical priesthood was God’s approved mediator in His dealings with Israel. The priest was consecrated as holy, and therefore an appropriate intermediary (Exodus 28:41). The priest also had the broader responsibility of issuing God’s Law to the commoners (Deuteronomy 17:8-13), and was like God’s representative to the people.

Presentation to the priest: In a representative and ceremonial sense, approaching a priest with one’s offering was like approaching God. The priest was not to be worshipped, but he had been designated as the mediator between God and the people of Israel. His role and adjudications were to be respected, since he was supposed to be knowledgeable about offering procedure (Leviticus 10:10, 11) and was authorised to carry out several of the steps beyond the privilege of the commoner (Leviticus 1:3-9).

Inspection of items: One of the officiating priest’s duties was to determine if the offering being presented was suitable, and that it met the criteria for that particular ceremony. The grain based offerings had to be of good quality. The animal had to be in good condition and fit for the purpose (Leviticus 1:3).

Laying on of hands: In the Scriptures, the act of a person laying hands upon another person or item usually indicated the dedication of that person or item for a special purpose. For instance, towards the end of his life, Moses laid hands upon Joshua to inaugurate him as the new future leader of the Israelites (Numbers 27:18-23). Earlier, representatives of the Israelites had laid hands upon the Levites “that they may perform the work of the LORD”

(Numbers 8:10, 11). In a sacrificial setting, the animal was being dedicated to the role it would perform in the offering ceremony. There is also the idea that this action was symbolic of substitution. Since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), what was about to happen to the animal should have happened to the offerer, but in this act, an innocent animal was being put forward in place of the offerer. Sometimes the notion of transfer was also present; for instance, the annual scapegoat had transferred to it all the sins of the Israelites on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:21, 22). However, the reader should exercise caution in attempting to apply the principle of transfer to every instance of the laying on of hands in Scripture.

Slaughter: No animals already dead were allowed to be brought. They had to be offered alive and in a good condition. This was to do with the substitutionary aspect. Only a valuable, living being was an acceptable substitute for a person's life; a mere carcass, even one that was otherwise perfect, would not do. The death of the animal took the place of the death that the offerer deserved ("the wages of sin is death" - Romans 6:23), and the exchange of one life lost in the place of another needed to be represented in the ceremony. On a practical level, an animal had to be killed so that it could be portioned out, either for incineration on the altar, or to be consumed as part of a meal.

Personal involvement: The original injunctions of Leviticus chapters 1 to 7 included a great degree of personal involvement by an offerer during the sacrificial process. Certainly, the earliest practices saw the close personal involvement of the offerer in selecting, presenting, slaying, skinning, portioning and washing an animal to be offered (Leviticus 1:3-9). As previously noted, this changed over the centuries as the priests gradually took on more of these roles. It is a serious matter for debate as to whether this should have been allowed to happen. The more "hands-on" a person was in bringing about the death of his sacrifice, the greater the appreciation was of what was being represented: how precious life is, and how repugnant sins and man's sinful nature are to God. When personal sacrifice evolved into more of a third-party act, some of that deeper appreciation was probably lost.

Blood: The handling of the blood, often referred to as the "manipulation" of the blood, involved three phases: (1) the collection of blood from the animal, (2) the application of some of the blood collected, and (3) the pouring out of superfluous blood at the base of the altar. It is likely that the first and third actions merely facilitated the more symbolic second action, whereby the blood was applied most commonly to the horns or sides of the altar, but then occasionally also to other holy items of the sanctuary and even to priests (e.g. Leviticus 1:5; Exodus 29:12, 20, 21). Importantly, blood represented life (Leviticus 17:11) and atonement was almost certainly implied in every instance of its application, whatever the particular offering context was. A person's sin - either one's inherent sin or a specific misdemeanour - warranted death (Romans 6:23). Once a substitute's blood had been presented, this was sufficient to stave off God's wrath; hence, that person's sin would be covered, and atonement secured. "The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Leviticus 17:11 - NIV) Without the shedding of blood, and its subsequent presentation to God, there was no remission of sin or sins (cp. Hebrews 9:22).



Heaving and waving: These acts (e.g. Leviticus 7:34) seem to have been a presentation towards God up in the heavens, however, no reason is actually specified in the Scriptures. Heave- and wave offerings were generally portions of either an animal or a grain-based offering that would later be consumed by the priest. Hence, with this action, those portions were usually presented to God, but not incinerated on the altar.

Placing upon the altar: The altar was the literal meeting place between God and the nation of Israel as a whole: “This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel.” (Exodus 29:42, 43). This is the specific place within the sanctuary compound where it was deemed that a person could meet with God and tangibly offer a gift expressing a sentiment or request. A portion of an animal, grain loaf, etc. would come in contact with the altar and the sentiment was understood to have been expressed. The total incineration of a portion also highlighted that whatever offering had been presented to God, and thus whatever sentiment had been conveyed, could not be retracted.

Libations (drink offerings): It is difficult to be precise about what these symbolised. It may be that they symbolised exactly what their respective “food” offerings did, but as a liquid. Uniquely, however, these were always “poured” (e.g. Genesis 35:14; Numbers 28:7, etc.), and there is the thought that such pourings perhaps indicated an honest and most heartfelt expression by the offerer. The prophet Samuel’s mother, Hannah “was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish”, later stating, “I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.” (1 Samuel 1:10, 15).

Smoke ascending: Biblical descriptions of several offerings describe the smoke, which was a visible sign of the offering ascending to God and being presented to Him in the heavens. The “pleasing aroma” said to have been produced was indicative of God’s approval and acceptance of the worshipful gesture that had just taken place (e.g. Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 1:9).

Concluding meal: Whilst a portion was always incinerated by the fire of the altar, the officiating priest sometimes received a portion of the animal or food, depending on the type of offering. From the commoners’ point of view, the priesthood was closely associated with God. On appropriately designated occasions, the priests partook of a kind of commemorative meal from the item/s offered, thus bringing to a conclusion the offerer’s ceremony. When the offering was a completion (or “peace”) offering, the offerer was required to partake also. This indicated the state of union and harmony being enjoyed between a commoner, the priesthood and God Himself; God’s share of the meal being that which had been consumed by the fire of the altar (Leviticus 7:11-17, 28-35).

Summary

Let us now attempt to draw together some of these ideas in such a manner as to capture the general essence of what the ancients understood by the offering process. In brief:

- A person wishing to express a particular sentiment towards God first determined what it was they needed or desired to do, whether it was seek forgiveness for a particular misdemeanour, display devotion, put forward a request, express thanks, or convey some other sentiment. Any such expression had to be honest and heartfelt.
- That person selected, prepared and brought an offering appropriate to the occasion into the designated precincts of God's presence on earth.
- The item to be presented was then handed to a priest, who was the representative of God to that person, and represented that person to God.
- The various components of the offering were portioned out and appropriately handled, according to the prescribed manner for each one.
- God received the offering by way of it being burnt on the altar, the meeting place between God and man.
- On occasions, a communal meal was shared, showing a degree of harmony between some or all of the parties involved.

Providing that the procedures were carried out properly, and with sincerity of heart, the offerer had effectively approached God, presented themselves and their gifts before Him, communicated with Him, and had their expression heard by Him. This is the essence of what was symbolised by the offering system.

Part D: Reflecting on the Offerings

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Chapter 15: Difficulties and Suggested Approaches

Having discussed some of the expressions behind the offerings, as well as their regulations and symbolism, let us now reflect upon some of the implications of our subject. We will begin by considering why the offerings and sacrifices of the Bible are not commonly understood amongst modern-day Christians.

What was involved in the sacrificial offering process, and the significance of it all, remains largely unknown to so many people. Here are several reasons why this may be the case:

(a) Overall, Bible reading is on the decline today. The Old Testament, where we find the most details about the sacrifices and offerings, is especially read very little. Sadly, this means that there are many Christians who are not aware that such things as offerings and sacrifices even existed as part of the worship process in Bible times, and there is a very limited familiarity with the Mosaic Law, of which the sacrificial system formed a major part.

(b) Very few, if any, Christians today have had first-hand experience in the practice of slaughtering and sacrificing an animal for an offering ceremony. For those who are aware of animal sacrifice in the Bible, the subject is often perceived to be of little relevance to their lives.

(c) In some circles, there exists an aversion to confronting and discussing the Biblical realities of killing and death. These acts, central to the offering system, are sometimes perceived as being primitive, unenlightened, cruel or repulsive - things not befitting of the modern Christian. This is despite the prominence given to the “death” and “blood” of Christ throughout the New Testament writings!

(d) For many modern-day Christians who have an awareness of the sacrificial offerings in Scripture to some degree, there is a tendency to take a short cut and head straight to considering how these things might apply to ourselves, before understanding what they meant to the original worshippers. Details of their significance to ancient worshippers is often bypassed in the pursuit of suggesting how Christ fulfilled them, and what lessons we might draw out for our own lives. These are not terrible motives, but it really is putting the cart before the horse, and many well-intended but unfounded conclusions have been reached as a result.

(e) The sacrificial regulations of Leviticus are undoubtedly complex in both nature and the letter of the Law. The rabbis, especially those of ancient times, often spent many hours poring over the minutest details, proposing their interpretations of the Law. Even they did not always draw the same conclusions as their peers, so we who may not have put in as many hours as they did should not expect to approach the details of the Law and think we will easily understand all the ins and outs without considerable time and effort.

(f) There is a general aversion to exploring the subject of offerings and sacrifices in detail. It is an interesting phenomenon that whilst there are hundreds of printed publications available

on the subject of either the Tabernacle or the Temples of Bible times - most of them actually very informative and helpful - there are relatively few on the topic of sacrifices. The vast majority of such works do address our subject to some degree, but the trend is to focus on the sanctuary building, its furniture, the high priest's attire, and the symbolism behind each of these. Lest I be misunderstood, I am very grateful for what such publications have taught me; however, given that sacrificial offering was the most frequently performed activity in the sanctuary, I can't help thinking that our subject deserves a greater share of the attention. As for the reason, it is probably a combination of all the suggestions put forth in points (a) to (e) above. Whatever the explanation, it is almost inevitable that the comparative scarcity of written work on the subject down through the years continues to perpetuate a lack of detailed consideration, and therefore a lack of understanding, about it today.

Suggested Approach to This Subject

Now that we have observed a few of the obstacles to comprehending our subject, what might we be able to do about it? I would suggest the following strategies:

- (1) Recognise that there is much to learn.
- (2) Pray that God will open the eyes of our understanding.
- (3) Familiarise ourselves with the meanings and the processes.
- (4) Be on the lookout for terms in the Bible that relate to sacrificial offerings.
- (5) Take time to observe the details.

Let us now flesh out some of these ideas.

(1) Recognise that there is much to learn about the Christian faith from a study of the sacrificial systems of Bible times. Remember, all Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16) - even those ritual-filled passages in Leviticus! Whilst Christians do not sacrifice animals today because Christ fulfilled the symbolism behind them once for all, we can become more familiar with what He achieved on our behalf through His sacrifice. We can also learn much about our relationship with God, what He requires of mankind, and what constitutes an appropriate walk for the believer.

(2) Pray that God will open the eyes of our understanding to see the important principles behind the offerings and sacrifices, and to grasp something of the procedures involved. God is "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6); He is hardly likely to show us anything about Himself if we don't earnestly want to know. May we desire to know Him better, and glorify Him more in the process.

(3) Familiarise ourselves with the meanings and the processes involved in the sacrifices. In discovering what the ancient faithful did, and why they did it, we can learn more about what Christ did on our behalf because He did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17). After all, how can we know what Christ's sacrifice on the cross fulfilled if we don't know at least some of the details behind the sacrifices of the Law? How can we

appreciate what it means for Christ to have died for humanity, if we do not understand why the animals prefiguring His greater act died? Part of becoming familiar with the subject involves unravelling several misleading or unhelpful English translations of Hebrew words relating to sacrificial terms.

(4) Be on the lookout for terms in the Bible that relate to sacrificial offerings. These are rather abundant in Scripture, even though they may not seem obvious at first. Sometimes they are plainly stated, such as when various people are said to be making offerings (e.g. Paul in Acts 21:26; the cleansed leper in Mark 1:44). At other times the setting implies that sacrificial offering is nearby or in the context. The sanctuary and the priesthood are each closely associated with sacrifices; therefore, narrative passages that involve the tabernacle or temple usually imply sacrificial activity, either in the account itself or nearby; for instance: King David worshipping (2 Samuel 12:20); Mary and Joseph presenting the baby Jesus (Luke 2:22-24); people gathering at the temple at various times (e.g. John 7:2, 14); Christ as an adult driving out the traders of animals etc. (John 2:13-16); and so on. Whenever an altar is mentioned (e.g. Genesis 12:7, 8), this also implies sacrifice, for this was the place to present such an offering. A reference to “blood” in the text (e.g. Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:12, etc.) may also be an indication of sacrificial activity. The list could go on, and there are probably many more than you initially think. Barely a page or two of Scripture passes without some sort of reference to sacrificial offering, or activity closely associated with it, so keep your eyes open for these as you read your Bible; this includes both Old and New Testaments.

(5) Take time to observe the details. When encountering words like “sacrifice”, “offer” or “offering” in a Bible passage, ask yourself a series of questions, such as:

(a) **Who are the people involved?** Note whether it is a personal offering being made on behalf of an individual and/or their family, a national offering being made on behalf of the nation of Israel, or an official offering being made on behalf of an Aaronic priest, the Aaronic priesthood as a whole, or a king/ruler, etc.

(b) **What type of offering is being made?** e.g. Is it a “peace” offering? Is it a “sin” offering? etc.

(c) **Is more than one sacrifice being carried out at the one occasion?** Often there will be more than one, and noting the particular types will help the reader to determine what was being expressed.

(d) **For what purpose is the sacrifice being made?** Note what circumstances lead up to the offering of a sacrifice, and that may answer this (and the previous) question.

Attempting to answer all of these questions may seem overwhelming at first, but they are worth pursuing. More detailed suggestions may be found in “Appendix 1: A Guide For Bible Readings Concerning Offerings”.

* * *

With this approach in mind, it is now time to consider some of the ways that the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the offerings.

Chapter 16: Christ's Fulfilment of the Offerings

There is little doubt that the tangible items and processes of the offering system were symbolic of greater spiritual truths, as has been discussed earlier. Many of the procedural steps, if not all of them, had significance to the people participating in the rituals.

In Chapters 11 to 13, we saw how the sacrificial process became highly regulated once the Mosaic Law was instituted. Hundreds of years later, Christ told His listeners, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.” (Matthew 5:17). We must appreciate that the offerings and their sacrifices formed a significant part of that Law He was referring to. As we have already seen, they were laden with symbolic representation of important truths and genuine sentiments in themselves. Ultimately, however, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, and not the animals or grain offerings, who gave the offerings their richest meaning.

Types and shadows

Symbols and pictures from the Old Testament that were fulfilled in Christ are called “types” or “shadows”. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the Law “having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things” (Hebrews 10:1). These Old Testament pictures highlight aspects of later and greater truths, a view supported in the New Testament by the apostle Paul writing concerning the Law:

... let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a **shadow** of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.
(Colossians 2:16, 17)

The regulations of the Law had genuine value in themselves. Indeed, they were efficacious. If a person had broken a certain commandment, he could bring a reparation offering of a ram, and the priest would “make atonement for him regarding his ignorance”, with the result that “it shall be forgiven him” (Leviticus 5:18). It wasn’t a kind of pretend atonement and forgiveness; these things were actual, as stressed by the phrases “the priest **shall** make atonement for him” and “it **shall** be forgiven him”. This was the system God had provided to allow atonement and forgiveness at that time, under those circumstances.

As valuable and functional as the sacrificial offerings were in themselves, it becomes obvious that they pointed forward to superior things. Types provide pictures for later readers to understand some aspect of God’s dealing with mankind. Whilst the food, drink and festivals mentioned in Colossians 2:16, 17 quoted above were legitimate and genuine expressions of the faithful people of Old Testament times who participated in them, they were also pictures teaching later readers about the real substance behind their meaning: namely, Christ.

This kind of phenomenon is often referred to as “type teaching”, and pictures from the Law are helpful for understanding various aspects of Christ or the Christian faith. For instance, a

sacrificial lamb without blemish epitomised meekness and the substitution of one without fault giving its life so that another might live. Through this portrait, we can gain some insight as to why Christ is called the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29), because the type draws our attention to Christ’s own sinlessness, meekness and substitutionary work. Note, though, that all type teaching breaks down somewhere, because the truths of the realisation are always so much deeper than the mere picture. This is illustrated in the fact that no sacrificial lamb was ever a truly sinless human being who offered itself for the purpose of forgiveness or atonement; a lamb never had the option to choose; a lamb didn’t have the capacity to understand what was happening; and so on; however, each of these could be said of Christ in His sacrificial work. Therefore, when seeking to draw lessons from type teaching, care should be taken to focus on the aspect of a type that is indeed “typical”, and not attempt to over-attribute meaning where it may not be warranted. Doing so may, in fact, serve to divert our attention away from a teaching of greater importance.

The New Testament book of Hebrews is full of type teaching from the Mosaic Law. I would venture so far to say that, without some degree of understanding about the Law, Hebrews will remain largely as a garbled mystery to the modern-day reader. This is because the epistle repeatedly refers to the offerings of the Law, as well as to those facets so closely linked with them - namely, the sanctuary and the priesthood - and these are each mentioned in the context of Christ’s fulfilment of the symbols they represent. The outstanding lesson is that what His ministry achieved regarding the things of the Law was “better”, a word used frequently in that epistle (e.g. Hebrews 1:4; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 (x2); 9:23; 12:24). The sacrifices pointed to Christ and we may say with confidence, along with the epistle’s writer:

... the law, having 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)

With this in mind, let us now consider some ways in which Christ fulfilled the symbols found in the system of offerings. I doubt we will ever know the full extent to which the offerings were fulfilled by Him, but the suggestions we shall now discuss are a starting point. We shall consider them in three categories: (1) Christ’s fulfilments based on the offerings system in general, (2) Christ’s fulfilments based on specific offering procedures, and (3) Christ’s fulfilments based on particular offerings.

(1) Some of Christ’s fulfilments, based on the offerings system in general

Relationship with God:

Put simply, the sacrificial offering system of Bible times was largely about God’s relationship with mankind. It was there to provide a way for fellowship with God to be restored and then also enjoyed. When Christ came, He offered Himself as the way to atone for mankind’s sin, and this is why every blessing the Christian possesses is said to have been achieved “in Christ”, “through Christ” or “by Christ”. The phrase “in Christ” occurs over 80 times in the

New Testament epistles alone, not including the many extra statements alluding to our blessings and standing before God that we could also class as being “in Christ”.

For a person to have a close relationship with God, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is essential. Everything the Christian possesses is, was and will be obtained through the work of Christ. His statement, “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6) is simple and to the point, and yet it is a deep and profound truth with far-reaching implications.

The Provision of God:

God has always provided ways for mankind to be reconciled to Him. In the Garden of Eden, animals were slain so that Adam and Eve could continue a degree of fellowship with God and not be struck dead on the spot. Furthermore, skins from those animals were made to cover their nakedness and prevent further offence. In that instance, it was God who was the provider of the solution, the method and the means to achieve this.

The offering system is often seen as being a burden to those under the Law. I have had many conversations on this subject with people who have said “I’m glad we don’t have to do **that** anymore!” No doubt, it was an unnecessary encumbrance for Gentile Christians in the first century A.D., who were being pressured by many Christian Jews to observe the Law (Acts 15:1-2, 22-31, Galatians 2:3-5, 15-16). However, speaking of the Law from an Israelite perspective, the Psalmist said, “I **delight** in it”, and that its precepts were the rejoicing of his heart (Psalm 119:35, 111). This is because the Law, including the offering system, was a provision of God instituted in order to allow a closeness with Israel not afforded to other nations at that time - “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people” (Exodus 19:5).

Later, through Christ, the one who came to fulfil the Law (Matthew 5:17), we see the gift and provision of God the Father displayed in another way:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16, cp. 1 John 4:9, 10)

Like the almost-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, it was God who provided for Himself the substitute lamb for the offering (Genesis 22:8). In the Genesis account, a ram caught in a thicket by its horns was provided; in the Gospel accounts, it was God’s only begotten Son who was provided. Even before His death, the centrality of Christ’s role in relating to God was plainly stated: “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Fuller explanation of the implications may be found in the writings after the crucifixion, where Christ Himself is also several times spoken of as being the provider of the required offering:

... our Lord Jesus Christ, who **gave Himself** for our sins (Galatians 1:3, 4 cp. 1 Timothy 2:5,6)

Christ also has loved us and **given Himself** for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2)

The Son of God, who loved me and **gave Himself** for me (Galatians 2:20)

Not only was Christ the being who was offered up, He was also the **provider** of that same offering. Every aspect of the Christian's reconciliation to God has been provided for by God Himself, and facilitated through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Atonement:

It was always God's intention to dwell with His creation. In the Garden of Eden, there was harmony and union. Upon the entrance of sin, a gulf between God and mankind formed, and this is a situation we still have today. Because the proper consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23), such sin must be dealt with. God wishes to have communion with His creation, and so the obstacle of sin must be covered, or "atoned for". When atonement is achieved, when a person's sin is covered to the point where it no longer is a hindrance to the relationship, God's wrath is averted, and fellowship with Him can be enjoyed.

Much of the sacrificial offering system is based on this premise. During the earliest centuries of mankind's existence, atonement was sought and achieved via the sacrificing of animals. Since the cross, atonement has been possible only through Christ:

[God] loved us and sent his Son as an **atoning sacrifice** for our sins. (1 John 4:10 NIV)

Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the **atoning sacrifice** for our sins (1 John 2:1,2 NIV)

God presented Christ as a **sacrifice of atonement**, through the shedding of his blood (Romans 3:25 NIV)

God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10)

In the verses above, where the NIV reads "atoning sacrifice" and "atonement", some older Bible versions use the word "propitiation", but the meaning is the same. See Appendix 2 for further discussion on atonement.

Mercy:

Closely associated with atonement is the idea of God's mercy. According to the principle stating that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), all sin should simply result in the death of the perpetrator. This is a major problem, because every human being has sinned (Romans 3:23). However, because God wishes to have fellowship with humanity, He has been merciful and provided ways for us to be spared from death.

In earliest times, this was via the system of offerings and sacrifices; since the cross, this has been through Christ. In each case, a substitutionary death took place. As we shall see in the section on "Cost" (below), atonement was not so much about payment for sin, but God being merciful and providing allowance that a substitute might die in the sinner's place. It is written in Paul's epistles:

... we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in **mercy**, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:3-5 NIV)

... the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His **mercy** He saved us ... through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

The phrase "atoning sacrifice" mentioned in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 (see the section on "Atonement" above) is a translation of the single Greek word *hilasmos*. This word is closely related to other words having an emphasis on mercy, such as *hilaskomai*, seen in the phrase, "God be **merciful** to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13) and *hileos*, seen in, "I will be **merciful** to their unrighteousness" (Hebrews 8:12). The term "mercy seat" is a translation of the Greek word *hilasterion* (Hebrews 9:5), which was the cover of the ark in the sanctuary's Holy of Holies and is better thought of as "the place of atonement". Indeed, it is alternately referred to as the "mercy seat" (NKJV) or the "atonement cover" (NIV). These *hilas-* words of the Greek New Testament are usually translated by the word "mercy" or some variant, whereas "atonement" and similar words in the Old Testament are translations of Hebrew words like *kippur* (such as in "Yom Kippur", meaning "Day of Atonement"). A comparison of the *hilas-* and *kippur-* words reveals a close correlation between atonement and mercy. Atonement is possible because God was merciful enough to allow our sin to be atoned for. Again, Appendix 2 discusses this aspect in more detail.

Cost:

When a worshipper presented an offering to the Lord, it always cost that person something. If the animal or grain was not from a person's own possessions, they would have to purchase the items required for the offering process. Either way, a cost was involved. David was aware of this principle when a piece of land, designated for building an altar, was being gifted to him free of charge. To this proposal, he replied, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a

price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.” (2 Samuel 24:24). See Chapter 3, Principle No.6, for more details.

As far as the cost of Christ’s sacrifice is concerned, I believe there is a large degree of misunderstanding. When a worshipper offered up an animal as a sin offering (Leviticus 4), he was not “paying the price” of his sin; neither was he reimbursing God for a “debt”; nor was he recompensing the Lord for something “owed”. Rather, he was taking up God’s offer of being allowed to offer a substitute in place of his own deserved death. If carried out with purity of intent, this was acceptable in God’s sight. In effect, it was not that God was considering an outstanding account to have been paid by this offering, but more mercifully, that He was satisfied with the offerer’s gesture, with the result that, concerning his sin, “it shall be forgiven him” (Leviticus 4:31).

Despite the words of many hymns, choruses and well-meaning Bible commentators, Christ did not “pay the price” of our sin per se. It is an astonishing fact that such phrases suggesting that Christ has “paid the price”, “paid the debt”, “paid the penalty”, etc. for our sins are not actually found in the Scriptures. These phrases sound like they should be in our Bibles, but are not there because they would actually be at odds with the concepts underlying the sacrificial system, which Christ is said to have fulfilled. His sacrifice was a fulfilment of the sacrifices of the Law (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:16, 17), but the sacrifices were not payments for sin. The reparation offering process often included a monetary component by way of compensating for damage incurred (e.g. Leviticus 5:15, 16), but even in that instance, a sacrifice to God was still offered, because that offering sought atonement - the aversion of God’s wrath - and was not a payment. The approach and purification offerings also each sought atonement (Leviticus 1:4; 4:31) but were not payments either.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me make it plain that faith in Christ’s work on the cross is totally sufficient for the believer to be reconciled to God: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Christ’s work was complete, and the believer is complete in Him as a result (Colossians 2:10). When a phrase like “Christ paid my debt” is spoken or sung, it is implied that there is nothing left to do to secure our salvation, and this implication is an undeniable truth supported by Scripture: “... by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Therefore, let us be clear to make this distinction: Christ’s offering made on our behalf had to be paid for, and the cost was extremely high - nothing less than the life of the Son of God. It is twice written of Christian believers, “you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). However, Christ’s offering of Himself on the cross was not a payment for the purpose of forgiveness of sin. To be more precise, it was more a loving act of self-sacrifice which sought, and secured, atonement for mankind’s sin.

Like the worshippers of old, who parted with costly possessions to seek the aversion of God’s wrath, we should be ever mindful that the Christian’s salvation didn’t come cheap, highlighting that matters of our sinful state and actions are not trivial issues to God.

Once for all:

The New Testament commentary on the sacrificial system under the Law, at least as it pertained to the Day of Atonement, is that, “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

Previously, it was suggested that the atonement made as a result of bringing a reparation offering wasn't a kind of pretend atonement or pseudo-forgiveness. Rather, these things were actual. The offering was effective, and achieved the desired outcome - “the priest **shall** make atonement for him”, “it **shall** be forgiven him” (Leviticus 5:17, 18). The same can be said about the purification offering (see Leviticus 4:31) closely related to the Day of Atonement offerings alluded to in Hebrews chapter 10. Those sacrifices were efficacious. The atonement and forgiveness sought was real.

If this is true, why are we then told plainly that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins”? The answer lies in the word “once”. The Levitical offerings were regular and frequent, and were required to be so. On the other hand, Christ's offering was a once-only event, yet it was sufficient to serve a multitude of purposes, without need of repetition. As discussed earlier, the word “better” sums up several themes in the book of Hebrews, but the word “once” is also a prevalent theme. Note the frequency of the word “once” in the epistle to the Hebrews:

For such a High Priest [i.e. Christ] was fitting for us ... who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did **once for all** when He offered up Himself. (Hebrews 7:26, 27)

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place **once for all**, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)

Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; **not that He should offer Himself often**, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another - He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; **but now, once** at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Hebrews 9:24-26)

Christ was offered **once** to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28)

When Christians discuss the reasons for Christ coming to the earth, surely the following must be included:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said, “... Behold, I have come ... to do Your **will**, O God”. (Hebrews 10:5, 7)

By that **will** we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. (Hebrews 10:10)

At least one accomplishment of Christ's obedience to the Father's will was that we have been sanctified, or set apart; and this took place via Christ's "once-for-all" offering.

Offerings, Priesthood, Sanctuary:

Earlier, it was stated that the sanctuary, priesthood and offerings are all closely linked in Scripture. When one of these aspects is mentioned in the Bible text, the other two are usually also mentioned, or at least implied, because of their strong ties.

In considering how Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the offerings, it is noteworthy that He fulfilled the symbolism of the priesthood and the sanctuary as well. We shall not explore these other fascinating areas in detail here, but the reader should observe that, not only is He the **Lamb** Who was slain (Revelation 5:12), but He is also referred to as the great **high priest** (Hebrews 4:14; 9:11), and also the very **dwelling place** of God (Colossians 2:9). Offering, officiating priest and sanctuary all in One!

We should stand in awe of the Lord Jesus Christ's greatness and never assume that we know all there is to know about the Godhead. Scripture reveals more about the Lord than we can possibly comprehend, but I suspect that, in the grand scheme of things, relatively little has actually been revealed to us! Complex, deep, profound and mysterious are all words that should come to mind when we consider the being, nature and work of Jesus Christ.

(2) Some of Christ's fulfilments, based on offerings procedures

The role of the priest:

Priests were mediators between God and mankind. They acted as God's representatives to the people, and the people's representatives to God. Before the Mosaic Law was given, the head of the household took on a priestly role as mediator between God and man (Genesis 8:20; Job 1:5). Later, under the Law, this role fell to a designated priest from the Israelite tribe of Levi (Deuteronomy 21:5).

At the cross, Christ assumed this mediatory role, of which it is said that, "there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5, 6). As mentioned earlier, He became not only the offering presented, but the priest who administered the offering. Note that He is now the only priest between mankind and God. Those who are given the title of "priest" in churches today may be fine Christian people doing good in their churches and communities, but they are not priests by any Biblical definition. One of the main tasks of Levitical priests was to be involved in the handling of animal portions and blood on behalf of offerers during the sacrificial process, and this simply does not happen today. More importantly, because there is now only "one mediator between

God and men”, there is no room for the local parish priest to fulfil that role, either. A member of the clergy may be able to instruct and guide church members, but they can never present themselves before God on behalf of a parishioner. Yet Christ is said to have this role.

Again, the epistle to the Hebrews has much to say about Christ’s priesthood. His fulfilment of the role of High Priest is discussed at length in Hebrews chapters 2 to 10. We will take a moment to briefly mention only two aspects.

(a) Christ’s empathy as a priest:

... in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and **faithful High Priest** in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation [“atonement” NIV] for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17)

... every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. **He can have compassion** on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. (Hebrews 5:1, 2)

The perfect and glorious Son of God was also the vulnerable yet sinless Son of Man (John 3:13, 18). As it is written:

... we have a **great High Priest** who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God ... we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:14, 15)

In that role, our Lord is able to empathise with us. We have a Saviour who was tested under the worst of circumstances and prevailed. He understands the kinds of weaknesses we have, and has shown us great compassion.

(b) The eternal nature of Christ’s unique priesthood:

The priests of the Law were from the order (or were descendants) of Aaron, whereas Christ was of the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17). A detailed exploration of this fascinating subject is beyond the scope of our present study; suffice to say that one of the features of Christ’s priesthood is its permanency:

... there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has **an unchangeable priesthood**. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25)

There is no longer a need for repeatedly presenting offerings to a priest for him to administer so that a person might remain in fellowship with God. If we are “in Christ”, our presentation to God is ongoing. That is not to say we should not continue to pray, do good works pleasing to God, or repeatedly give thanks to Him (Colossians 4:2; 2 Timothy 3:14), but our standing

and fellowship with the Father remains intact because of the permanency of Christ's mediatory work.

Inspection of animal:

Animals offered for sacrifice had to be of the best quality. Almost always they had to be "without blemish" (e.g. Leviticus 1:3). The truth of Christ being without blemish is found in the New Testament epistles:

... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb **without blemish and without spot**. (1 Peter 1:18,19)

He was manifested to take away our sins, and **in Him there is no sin**. (1 John 3:5)

It was one thing for Jesus of Nazareth to be declared sinless by His followers, such as Peter and John; it was quite another for Him to be inspected and found without sin by those who had nothing to gain by declaring Him to be so. Just as an animal was affirmed to be without blemish before being sacrificed, Christ was declared to be "without blemish" by several people shortly before He offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice:

Judas: "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4 NIV).

Pilate's wife: "Have nothing to do with that just man" (Matthew 27:19).

Pilate: "this just person" (Matthew 27:24).

Herod: he found "nothing deserving of death has been done by Him" (Luke 23:15).

The thief on the cross: "this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41).

The Roman centurion at the foot of the cross: "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47)

None of these people had a vested interest to speak of Christ being without blemish, yet they all felt compelled to declare Him so.

Laying on of hands:

In general, the laying on of hands in Bible times indicated that the recipient had been designated for a particular role or task. More specifically, on the Day of Atonement, a goat was designated as a substitute to symbolically receive the sins of the Israelites via hands being placed firmly upon its head (Leviticus 16:21, 22).

In terms of the Lord fulfilling this part of the sacrificial ritual, there doesn't seem to be an occasion when Christ literally had hands laid upon Him in this fashion. Certainly, He was taken hold of in the Garden of Gethsemane by His captors, but that is quite a different thing. Nevertheless, the substitutionary role He would play was quite clear, even in the days of Isaiah, 700 years or so before the crucifixion:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was **wounded for our transgressions**, He was **bruised for our iniquities**; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed ... the LORD has **laid on Him the iniquity of us all**. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Slaughter:

An inevitable part of the sacrificial process was the killing of the animal. Soon after the Lord Jesus began to tell His disciples of His own impending death (Mark 8:31), He spoke briefly of the reason:

... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

The writers of the New Testament epistles elaborate upon this reason by stating that His death brought about reconciliation with God:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh. (1 Peter 3:18)

... you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works ... now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. (Colossians 1:21, 22)

Many other New Testament passages use the figure of Christ being the "Lamb of God" in this sacrificial sense. One such passage reads:

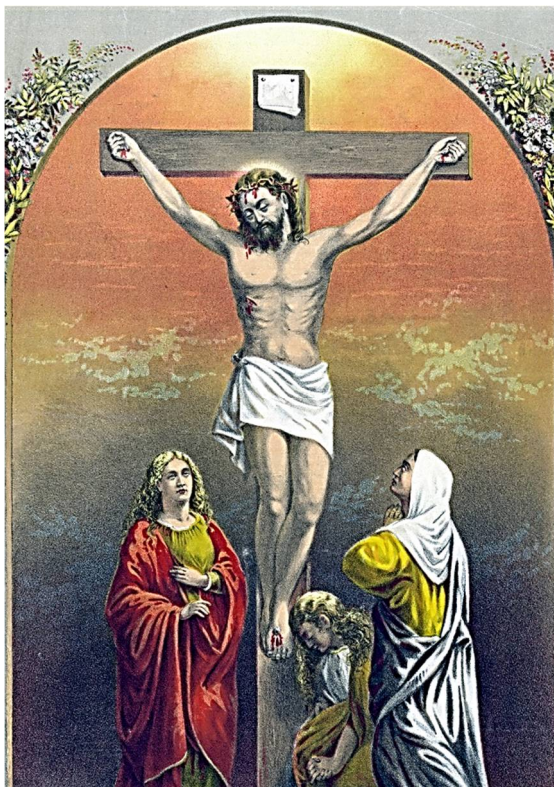
The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "**He was led as a sheep to the slaughter**; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, **of whom does the prophet say this**, of himself or of some other man?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached **Jesus** to him. (Acts 8:32-35, referring to Isaiah 53:7, 8)

There are over 30 references to Christ as a lamb or the lamb in New Testament. The vast majority of them are in Revelation and refer to the Lamb who was slain. A concordance or

search for the word “lamb” will reveal how prevalent this term is in the Apocalypse. A typical example is:

I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb** as though it had been slain (Revelation 5:6)

It is hard not to be reminded of the sacrificial system when we read of Christ being the “lamb who was slain”. Simply put, He fulfilled this type. Back in Chapter 13 of this book, we examined procedures involved in the sacrificial process, and pictures of slain animals were included amidst that discussion. There was some hesitation about using such images (“do readers really need to see the blood of a slaughtered animal?”, etc.), and whilst it is true that Christ’s body was not ever cut up, portioned out, or placed on an altar and burned, etc., the reality of His death on the cross demands that we sometimes face the horror and very real unpleasantness of what took place. We rightly sing hymns about “the old rugged cross”; we gladly proclaim that “there is power in the blood of the Lamb”; there are hundreds of Christian songs and paintings abounding with images of His “blood”, “death” and “sacrifice” in their content. Yet, so many of these depictions of Christ on the cross significantly understate just how repulsive the crucifixion scene must have been, and it is important that we occasionally pause to more deeply ponder the awfulness of what He suffered in the flesh.



Left: A lithograph from the late 1800's, depicting the crucifixion as peaceful and scenic.

Right: A more realistic portrayal of the gory horror of crucifixion.

The crucifixion was not just a sad but beautiful occasion (as depicted in the 19th century lithograph above), it was utterly horrible. The 2004 film “The Passion of the Christ”, despite its flaws, has probably visually captured this pain and suffering of Christ in His final days as realistically as any depiction I am aware of. His death was inhumane, gory, horrific, agonizing, bloody and not pretty or attractive in any way. The beatings and whippings, combined with the nailing of his limbs, meant that He would have had countless open

bleeding wounds, and been physically quite unsightly. Is it unnecessarily morbid to focus on Christ's last hours in this way? No. Actually, our acknowledgement of this horror should serve to heighten our awareness of His humility and the greatness of the gift bestowed upon us. It should emphasise the lengths that God went to in order to bring the lost human race back to Himself. The "slaughter" of the Lord Jesus - for it is entirely appropriate to use such a word - should not be glossed over or sanitised just because we may not be comfortable with the dreadfulness of its truth.

Blood:

Blood played a central role in the sacrificial offering sequence. For the relevant offerings, an animal was chosen according to specific criteria, dedicated for a purpose, carefully slaughtered, and then had its blood collected and handled in one of several designated ways. The blood of a substitutionary animal represented the life of the offerer (Leviticus 17:11). The deserved death for sin (Romans 6:23) was effectively being presented to God, albeit via a beast's blood instead of a human's. This principle is summarised thus:

According to the law almost all things are purified with **blood**, and without shedding of blood there is no remission [of sins]. (Hebrews 9:22)

What the blood of Christ fulfilled and accomplished would easily take up another book in itself, so the following is just a brief selection. Note the place of Christ's blood in each passage quoted:

In Him we have redemption through His **blood**, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7)

... you were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious **blood** of Christ (1 Peter 1:18,19)

the **blood** of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

having now been justified by His **blood**, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (Romans 5:9)

... now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the **blood** of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His **blood**, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13, 14)

We deserved death, but Christ's blood has atoned for us. Through it, we have been delivered from the power of death and brought near to God. We should never shy away from speaking of the blood of Christ, for our very lives eternally depend upon it.

There are many other accomplishments Christ's blood achieved, including the ratifying of the new covenant with Israel (Matthew 26:28 cp. Jeremiah 31:31; Exodus 24:1-8;), making peace between Jewish and Gentile believers (Ephesians 2:14-16), and even the cleansing of the heavens (Hebrews 9:18-24), to name but a few. It is central to so many of the purposes of God being realised.

Let us once more remind ourselves of the gracious provision of God and the role of Christ's blood in the scheme of things. In Acts 20:28, Paul spoke of the believers at Ephesus, which he referred to as "the church of God, which He purchased with **His own blood**". The implications of God shedding His own blood are enormous, manifold and should fill us with awe. The One Who was and is God did this for us!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14)

you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight (Colossians 1:21, 22)

The Word was God, He took on flesh and blood, and then offered that flesh and blood for us. There was no obligation for our God and Saviour to have done this, but such is the love of God that He did (John 3:16)!

Personal involvement:

In the earliest days of the Mosaic Law, the offerer was always "hands-on" with the offering procedures. The Levitical regulations allowed him to carry out the first stages, up to a point, after which, the priests took over and completed the process (see Leviticus 1:3-9).

Whilst many humans certainly played their part in the killing of Christ, and are attributed as such (Mark 9:31; Acts 3:14, 15), the Lord Jesus was involved in every step of His own sacrificial offering. He allowed Himself to be captured (Matt 26:49-54), examined (Matthew 26:57-67), and prepared for crucifixion and death (Matthew 27:26-31). He even dictated the timing of His last breath, drawing a response of awe from the centurion standing nearby (Luke 23:26, 47). All of this is confirmation of the Lord's own declaration:

I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. (John 10:17, 18)

As has already been mentioned, the epistles speak, not only of a life that was given, but that Christ willingly and actively gave this Himself:

our Lord Jesus Christ, who **gave Himself** for our sins (Galatians 1:3, 4)

the Son of God, who loved me and **gave Himself** for men (Galatians 2:20)

Jesus Christ, who **gave Himself** for us (Titus 2:13, 14)

He came to do the Father's will (John 6:38; Hebrews 10:7) and He saw it through to completion. However, unlike the bulls, sheep and goats of ancient times, the Lord was no passive victim. On the contrary, He was quite willingly proactive in His sacrifice. Thus, it can be said, He "gave Himself".

Smoke ascending:

As the portions of an offering were placed on the altar, the resultant smoke was said to be "a sweet aroma to the LORD" (Leviticus 1:9; 2:2; 3:5; 4:31). The offerings, when carried out sincerely, were gestures pleasing to God. The actions of Christ giving Himself for us are compared with that phrase:

Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a **sweet-smelling aroma**. (Ephesians 5:2)

With His life, the Lord Jesus was pleasing to the Father. At least twice during His earthly life, the voice of God from the heavens audibly affirmed this: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). With His sacrificial death also, the Lord Jesus pleased the Father, and the result was "a sweet-smelling aroma". Nevertheless, we should remind ourselves that there was nothing very pleasant about the road to achieving this. Note the prophecy of Isaiah 53:

He was oppressed and He was afflicted ... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter ... He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked ... He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7-9)

These dark and sombre words reflect the gravity of what took place. In the context of the awfulness of the Christ's suffering, crucifixion and death, however, the Scripture has this to say: "It **pleased** the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief" (v.10). It pleased God. It was pleasing because it paved the way for mankind to be reconciled back to God, something obviously important to Him. What does this say about the lengths our Maker has gone to in order that this might be achieved? "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." (John 3:16), which may also be expressed as, "God loved the world in this way, that He gave His only begotten Son ...".

(3) Some of Christ's fulfilments, based on specific offerings

We shall now consider some fulfilments of the five major offerings.

Reparation Offering:

Let us remind ourselves that the reparation offering was a variation of the purification offering. It was a presentation seeking to atone for sinful deeds that had usually resulted in loss, harm or injury to another party. An animal was brought, as well as a monetary offering as compensation to pay for the damage, to which was added 20% value. If, for example, a neighbour's donkey worth 10 shekels had been accidentally killed, monetary compensation of 12 shekels had to be offered, i.e. 10 shekels for the cost or replacement, plus 2 shekels being the 20% added value.

It may be difficult to draw an immediate parallel between the reparation offering and Christ's actions on the cross. The Lord Jesus was sinless, and He did not need to offer His life for His own sin, so there is no correlation in that regard. However, there is at least one aspect that was reflected in His sacrifice in that the offering He made on the cross was extremely valuable, the cost of Christ's offering being greater than the cost of the damage humanity caused. If we say that a human's life is beyond any monetary value, how much more valuable was the life of the one who was not only fully man, but also fully God. The blood of Christ is spoken of in these terms:

(the church of) **God** which He purchased with **His own blood** (Acts 20:28)

No wonder Peter refers to "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19). Precious indeed! We see this principle of Christ's offering being of much greater value than the harm caused by humanity's sin spelled out in the epistles:

The free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, **much more the grace of God and the gift** by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. (Romans 5:15)

The grace of our Lord was **exceedingly** abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 1:14)

Purification Offering:

The purification offering, most commonly translated as the "sin offering" (Leviticus 4:29), is closest to the concept most of us have when we think of Christ dying in our place.

We have all heard the phrase "Christ died for my sins". As a young Christian, I had difficulty understanding why it was that Christ had to die, and I believe it to be the experience of many others, as well. I'm sure I had it explained to me (perhaps several times!) by the patient and

mature leaders of my church, but since becoming a little more familiar with the principles fundamental to the sacrificial offering process, it has made much more sense:

- In the beginning, God created and was in harmony with mankind.
- Sin then entered and created a gulf between God and mankind.
- Mankind's sin brings disfellowship from God and deserves death.
- God provided the means by which our sin could be covered, and eternal separation from God averted. Firstly, this was through the sacrificial system, and then (as it is now) through believing in Christ as our substitute.
- Through Christ, we can be reconciled to God.

There is much more to this, as we are exploring in this chapter, but the above progression is the essence of the matter. With this train of thought in mind, let us now discuss Christ's fulfilment of the purification offering.

We have failed God with our many sinful acts but, thankfully, Christ died in our place in order to bring us back into fellowship with our Creator. Several verses attest to this:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7; see also Colossians 1:14)

Jesus Christ ... gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed (Titus 2:13, 14)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18)

You know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin (1 John 3:5)

These may all be summed up by saying simply that "Christ died for our sins".

Further to this, note that 1 John 3:5 quoted above makes reference to Christ's own sinlessness - "in Him there is no sin". The Greek word translated "sin" in that last reference is *hamartia*. Not only is *hamartia* used for those misdemeanours against God, but it is also used for the very offering provided to address those misdemeanours - the purification (or "sin") offering. Bringing a few thoughts together, this leads us to consider 2 Corinthians 5:21, which most translations render as: "[God] made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us". However, the question must be asked: If Christ became sin for us, what sort of act of worship would even more sin and impurity be to God? Not one that was acceptable to Him, because that is the sort of thing humans were to avoid and to have purged from their lives before approaching God with their offerings. This verse makes much more sense when we read it as "[God] made Him who knew no sin to become **a sin offering** for us", as the NIV shows as an alternative reading in its footnote to the verse. By this principle, it is further confirmed that

Christ not only fulfilled the type of the purification offering by dealing with sins, but He also actually became the required offering itself.

Approach Offering:

The approach offering was the commonest form of sacrificial offering. It sought atonement for a person's inherent sin, as distinct from a person's sinful deeds, which were more appropriately addressed by the reparation and purification offerings. This was in order that a person might be able to draw nearer to God and be in fellowship with Him.

From the earliest days of the Mosaic Law, the morning and evening sacrifices of the approach offering formed a regular part of Israel's worship (Exodus 29:38-43), and it is in this context that John the Baptist was able to declare of Christ: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), and be understood by the people of the day. Two lambs were offered daily on behalf of the people of Israel as a nation, seeking atonement for their inherent sinful nature.

The concept of a sinful nature, from which proceed forth sinful actions, is reinforced by the epistle writers:

the Scripture has confined **all under sin** (Galatians 3:22)

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

However, the glorious truth of Christ fulfilling the approach offering role in addressing our inherent sin, is also stated:

the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from **all sin** (1 John 1:7)

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ... for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of **sin** and death. (Romans 8:1, 2)

For those who believe on Him, Christ's offering has made atonement, averted God's wrath and also brought us near to God. This is an idea closely associated with the approach offering, as it is essentially about approaching God. In order for a person to draw near to God, the problem of their inherent sin has to be addressed, and this has been done by means of His sacrifice:

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:8-10)

Bearing in mind that sin separates mankind from God (Romans 3:23), it is through belief in Christ that we may draw near and be reconciled to God. This, also, was achieved via the Lord Jesus fulfilling the type of the approach offering:

in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:13)

Those words from Ephesians 2 were written specifically about Gentile believers, who, previously as non-Israelites, had no rights to approach God except via Israel, who were His kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). Only Israelites could enter the inner courts of the sanctuary, God’s dwelling place on earth (Acts 21:27-29); only Israel’s Levite priests could approach the holy places and handle the holy articles (Exodus 30:18-21), and only the Israelite High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, the location of the presence of God on earth (Leviticus 16). The Jerusalem temple does not exist today, but the principle of approaching God remains. He is holy, and His holiness will not be compromised. Yet for both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, we are represented by Him. Even though we deserve to be “far off”, we are considered to have been “brought near” to God’s presence. Paul puts it this way:

you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now **He has reconciled** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight (Colossians 1:21,22)

We were far off, enemies with God, and deserved the wrath of God by way of death because of our sin. Instead, through the blood of Christ, we have now been saved from God’s wrath, been permitted to approach Him, been brought near, and have now been reconciled to God, being presented as holy and blameless. What a wonderful fulfilment of the approach offering!

Tribute Offering:

The tribute offering was an offering expressing thanks, homage and submission. It was an acknowledgement that the offerer owed their existence and the provision of everything to God. We have already discussed some of what Christ has done for us, in bringing us from death to life, so we shall not repeat most of those things here. Quite apart from our salvation and reconciliation to God, however, we owe our very existence to Christ, as summed up succinctly in the following verses:

By Him [Christ] all things were created ... All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Colossians 1:16)

All things were made through Him [Christ], and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:3, 4)

We not only owe our existence, but also the blessings we have, to Christ:

God ... has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ** (Ephesians 1:3)

Under the Mosaic Law, the tribute offering was primarily grain-based, and usually presented to God in the form of a cake or a loaf of bread. At a time when the annual festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread were drawing near (John 6:4), and in response to a statement about God having provided the Israelites of old with manna from heaven, the Lord Jesus said of Himself:

Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world ... I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger (John 6:32-35)

Once again, in His fulfilment of an offering, we see a familiar theme. Christ Jesus is both the provider of man's every need, and the giver of the highest form of thanks, homage and submission to God. He is, at the same time, not only the offering and the offerer, but also the One who should be afforded every praise as the giver of all things!

Completion Offering(s):

The completion offerings were several in type and varied in the sentiments they expressed. These were only applicable once a person was considered to be in fellowship with God, or at "peace" with Him. Such offerings could be made once a state of reconciliation had been reached - the person needing to be in a clean or holy state, their sinful deeds having been atoned for via the purification and reparation offerings, along with their sinful nature via the approach offering (see the sequence discussed earlier in Chapter 10). Therefore, we have at least **two** aspects to consider: what "peace" or completion meant in Christ's life and death, and how that peace and fellowship was enjoyed.

Christ Himself was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He was never out of fellowship with the Father, and the peace between Himself and the Father was never broken ("I and My Father are One" - John 10:30). Christ's life had been pleasing to the Father from His birth up until point when His ministry began (Matthew 3:17); and after this, He continued to be pleasing to the Father (Matthew 17:5), by carrying out His will: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). He was obedient "to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8 cp. Hebrews 10:5-7). In light of this, the last recorded words Christ uttered on the cross should not come as a surprise. His cry of "It is finished!" (John 19:30) could also be rephrased as "It has been completed!". Both phrases are translations of a single Greek word, *tetelestai*, based on the verb *teleo*, meaning to draw things to a concluding point or consummation.

Tying together a few of these ideas, we see that Christ was in fellowship with His heavenly Father by being pleasing to Him. He also fulfilled the completion offering by way of those

things “finished” in His life and death - carrying out the Father’s will and giving His very self. In doing so He also became the one who completed what was necessary for our salvation. Yet again, in characteristic fashion, we find He is described as embodying all facets of our relationship with God: “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Regarding the Lord Jesus always being at peace with the Father, the suggestion is sometimes made that the three-hour period of darkness during the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45) came about because the Father could not look upon the Son due to the sin He had taken on. Had Christ, at that time, become so abhorrent to the Holy God? Personally, I question that this placed Christ out of fellowship with the Father, because the pictures presented by the offerings do not tend to suggest this. Even as part of the “sin” offering (which we know as the purification offering), portions of one animal sacrificed were placed on the altar and created “a sweet aroma to the LORD” (Leviticus 4:31), whilst the remaining portions were to be eaten by the “holy” priests (Leviticus 6:26). Both of these actions brought the offerer closer to God, instead of widening the gulf. Rather than making the offerer less bearable to God, they were welcome steps towards bringing the two parties nearer. This is also in keeping with the prophet’s words, “it pleased the LORD to bruise Him” (Isaiah 53:10). Setting aside many of the other perplexing questions surrounding the period of darkness, there is little doubt that the Lord Jesus enjoyed a close relationship with His heavenly Father, one of peace, unity and harmony.

Almost the last action Christ partook of as a free man was a meal with His disciples, an event we often refer to as “the last supper” (John 13 to 17). Once Judas the betrayer had left this gathering (John 13:30), the Lord’s teaching to the dear friends remaining took on a more personal flavour,

expressing a closeness of relationship reserved for those in the nearest of fellowship with Him. This is somewhat reminiscent of the commemorative meal enjoyed by the priesthood at the conclusion of many offering ceremonies.



Over many centuries, and still celebrated in a modified form by many

today, Israel’s annual Passover meal was observed by the devout family, the head of the household being their mediator. Symbolically, this meal was shared with God, for it was actually termed “the Lord’s Passover”. Upon the conclusion of a completion offering ceremony, a meal was shared by the offerer and his family, along with the officiating priests (Leviticus 7:11-17) who received a portion of the offering; the several portions placed on the altar being the Lord’s portions (Leviticus 3:3-5). At the last supper, Christ and His disciples

shared a meal and close fellowship together, with the Lord Jesus Himself being regarded as “God’s portion” of this gathering. To be clear, the meal in the upper room was almost certainly the Passover meal, a meal associated with an annual festival, so there was obviously a specific event being commemorated and symbolised. Nevertheless, the principle of communion and fellowship being enjoyed by all parties feature strongly on each of these three occasions, and the last supper may also qualify as a fulfilment by Christ of one aspect of the completion offering.

Under the offering system, there were three main varieties of completion offering: those offered in **thanks**, those accompanying a **vow**, and those that were a **voluntary** expression of worship and devotion (Leviticus 7:12, 16). We see echoes of these three aspects in the Lord’s life and His words:

Then He took the cup, and gave **thanks**, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is **shed** [voluntarily] for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you [a vow], **I will not drink** of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:27-29)

Christ was in close fellowship with the Father. That being the case, notice the **thanks** He gave and the **vow** He made, each in the context of the blood He was about to **voluntarily** shed by way of His sacrificial offering. At any stage, He could have elected not to have gone through with this (Matthew 26:50-54). The ratifying of the New Covenant was the beginning of a fulfilment of an Old Testament promise (Jeremiah 31:31-34), but it was also a form of fulfilling the types of the thankfulness, votive and voluntary aspects of this collection of offerings.

The completion offerings of old were an expression to God made by those in fellowship with Him. The Christian believer has this privilege also:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **rejoice** in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1, 2)

For those of us who “have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”, there is the opportunity to revel and thrive in that relationship. Fellowship with God is a reason for much joy (“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” - Philippians 4:4). Note the emphasis on rejoicing in that state of peace, as a result Christ’s sacrifice:

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were **reconciled to God** through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, **but we also rejoice in God** through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:9-11)

Truly our **fellowship** is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your **joy** may be full. (1 John 1:3, 4)

* * * *

As stated at the outset of this chapter, the suggestions here are unlikely to form an exhaustive or definitive list of how Christ fulfilled the offerings. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the reader may be able to catch at least a glimpse of how this was achieved. What a great Saviour we have; how much we have had to ponder over, and yet how much more probably took place that has been left unsaid! This brings to mind a thought expressed at the conclusion of John's Gospel:

There are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:25)

Perhaps we could say something similar about His fulfilment of the offerings and sacrifices, too. There really isn't a place for ungrateful or miserable Christianity, when we consider what manifold and marvellous blessings the precious blood of Jesus Christ has accomplished through His sacrificial offering. May we too, therefore, express a joy that is full!

Chapter 17: Offerings in Future Times

Having discussed, at some length, Christ's fulfilments of the offerings, it may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that sacrificial offerings shall be carried out once more in future times - and all with God's approval. For the Bible student who takes the Word of God literally, there can be little doubt of their resumption, as we shall see. However, one obvious question is, "Why?". It is a legitimate query and a worthwhile one to explore, despite the difficulties presented.

Therefore, this chapter will focus on two main areas for us to discuss. Firstly, we will establish that indeed there will be the carrying out of God-ordained sacrificial offerings in times to come. Secondly, we will consider why this might be and what purposes the future offering of sacrifices may have.

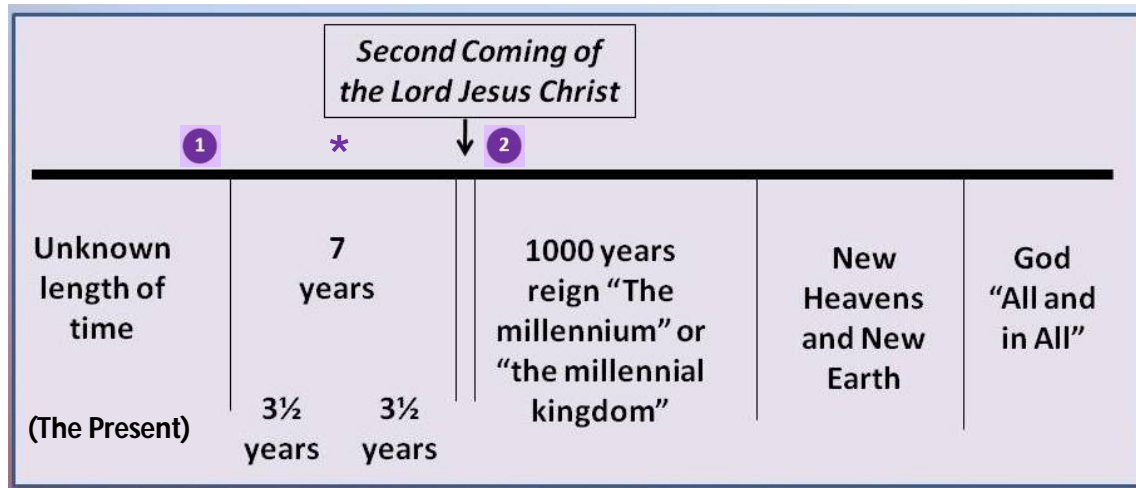
(1) Establishing the fact of future sacrifices

What part of "the future" is being referred to?

It is impossible to discuss future things without first considering a prophetic scheme of some sort. Theologians frequently debate about things to come, and it is rare that there is 100% agreement amongst them on any proposed prophetic schedule. The approach taken in our discussions is one of literal interpretation; i.e. the words of a Bible text mean what they say, unless undoubtedly there is imagery present in the passage concerned. This method will necessarily be reflected in the thoughts put forward in this chapter.

A proposed prophetic scheme in abbreviated form is shown on the next page. The scheme implies the existence of **two** future temple buildings: one before Christ's return (which shall be destroyed or extensively damaged), and another after His return (either a newly rebuilt temple, or perhaps the previous one repaired and greatly refurbished). The existence of one or both is acknowledged by many respected theologians and commentators, but generally a lot less attention is paid to the sacrificial offering process that must take place inside those structures. This is understandable because, if for no other reason, there seems to be little need for it upon first glance. Should things come to pass as suggested here, future sacrificial offerings will be carried out during **two** separate eras under differing sets of circumstances.

***... future sacrificial offerings will be carried out during two separate eras
under differing sets of circumstances ...***



1 First era of future sacrifices - Before Christ's Return:

- At some point, a new temple will need to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Currently, there is no temple in Jerusalem, because the temple of Christ's day was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. and, to date, it has not been replaced. This rebuilding must take place before Christ's second coming, because a number of prophecies concerning that time speak of events taking place in a temple that is already standing (e.g. Revelation 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15).
- Sacrifices will be offered there for a time.
- Approximately three and a half years before Christ's return, these offerings shall cease (Daniel 9:26, 27; 11:31; 12:11). *
- Some time before Christ's return, the temple will either be destroyed, or be damaged extensively.

2 Second era of future sacrifices - After Christ's Return:

- The Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth (Matthew 24:29-31; Zechariah 14:1-5), an event commonly referred to as Christ's Second Coming.
- He shall establish a kingdom on earth for 1000 years (Revelation 19:11-20:6). This is often referred to as the millennial kingdom.
- Some time after Christ's return, a new temple shall be built (or the previous one comprehensively refurbished), according to the pattern set out in Ezekiel 40-48 (see also Revelation 7:9-17).
- Sacrificial offerings shall take place there again, and be presented for the duration of the millennial kingdom.
- The millennial kingdom will draw to a close (Revelation 20:5).
- The New Jerusalem shall then descend to the earth (Revelation 21:2). Amidst the description of that city, we read that there will be no temple within its walls, because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22). In the absence of a temple-like building, and no description of a priesthood or offering regime, it seems likely that sacrifices will, finally, no longer be offered.

Let us now work our way through some of the relevant issues in determining the certainty of future offerings.

Temple, Priesthood and Sacrifices

Recalling what we have discussed in earlier chapters, it has been stated many times that the **sanctuary**, the **priesthood** and the **offerings** are integrally linked with each other. This is evidenced in the Scriptural instructions about the sacrificial process. For instance:

If his **offering** is a burnt sacrifice [approach offering] of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the **tabernacle** of meeting before the LORD ... Then the **priests**, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar. (Leviticus 1:3, 8)

From one viewpoint, it could be said that the **offerings** were presented at the sanctuary with the assistance of a priest. From a different perspective, we could emphasise the role of the **sanctuary** and it could be said that it was the place where the priests administered the offering of sacrifices. Accentuating the mediatory side, we might stress that the **priesthood's** role was to intercede between the Israelite people and God by facilitating the offering process at the sanctuary. No matter where the emphasis is placed, it becomes clear that one aspect did not and could not exist without the other two. Remembering the old adage, "Where there's smoke, there's fire.", we could also say, "Where we read of a temple in the Bible, there are also priests and sacrificial offerings."

***... where we read
of a temple in the
Bible, there are
also priests and
sacrificial
offerings ...***

Just as each of these facets played a central role in ancient Israel's procedural worship, each will also have a place in times yet to come. To most people who view the Scriptures literally, a future temple is quite apparent. However, what is less frequently discussed is that the existence of such a future temple also implies, and even necessitates, a future priesthood and a future sacrificial routine. Bear this in mind as we now seek to demonstrate the certainty of these things.

A literal temple with sacrifices before Christ's return

At the time when Christ walked the earth, the temple in Jerusalem played a major role in Israel's life and worship. Sacrifices and many other ceremonies and rites were performed there. Since 70 A.D., however, there has been no temple on Mount Zion, and the question is sometimes asked, "Will the Temple literally be rebuilt, or do the Scriptures talk about a future temple in a spiritual sense?".



Herod's Temple

(model at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem)

A brief look at a few Scriptures should be evidence enough to show that there will indeed be a literal rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem. Matthew 24 is a chapter dealing with signs of things to come, and a literal temple plays a major role amongst those signs. Note that the chapter begins with the Lord looking at the literal temple of His time, which is often called “Herod's Temple”, and speaking to the disciples of its destruction (24:1,2). It is certainly no coincidence that the record then immediately

tells us of the disciples questioning the Lord about His coming, because the two aspects are closely related.

Christ was looking at the temple which was to be later destroyed in 70 A.D., but in order for the rest of the events in Matthew 24 to take place in the future, there must again be a literal temple, which must be rebuilt and standing by the time these things eventually come to pass. Further on in the chapter, the Lord describes many of the terrible events prior to His second coming (24:4-28) such as wars, earthquakes, deception by false prophets, etc. - all of which will be literal phenomena. Among these signs is the sign spoken of by Daniel: the “abomination of desolation” in the holy place of the temple:

when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in **the holy place** ... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15, 16)

We know this is referring to the holy place of the temple, because in Daniel, from which the Lord was quoting, there is a description of the destruction of both the city and the sanctuary:

after the sixty-two weeks ... the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the **sanctuary** ... and on the wing of **abominations** shall be one who makes **desolate** (Daniel 9:26,27).

forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the **sanctuary** fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the **abomination** of **desolation** (Daniel 11:31)

Reference is also made to this desolation in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4 and Daniel 12:11. In the surrounding phrases, there are many references to very literal things, such as the literal return of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:8), the literal rebuilding of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25), and literal nations such as Persia, Egypt, Moab, Edom, Ammon, Libya, Ethiopia, etc. (Daniel 11:2, 8, 41, 42, etc.).

All of the above points to a specific temple building that must be constructed before the Lord's second coming. It will be built and then destroyed before the Lord's return. Where

there is a temple in Scripture, there are always sacrifices, as further evidenced in Daniel's prophecy:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to **sacrifice** and offering. (Daniel 9:27)

then they shall take away **the daily sacrifices** (Daniel 11:31)

And from the time that **the daily sacrifice** is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. (Daniel 12:11)

Let us remind ourselves that there is currently no temple standing in Jerusalem. In order for these prophecies to be fulfilled, it must yet be rebuilt. When it is again standing, sacrifices will be offered there. The sacrifices will need to have already been reinstituted several years before the Lord's return, because Daniel (see also 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4) writes of them being brought to an end at the hand of the "man of sin" about three and a half years before the Second Coming.

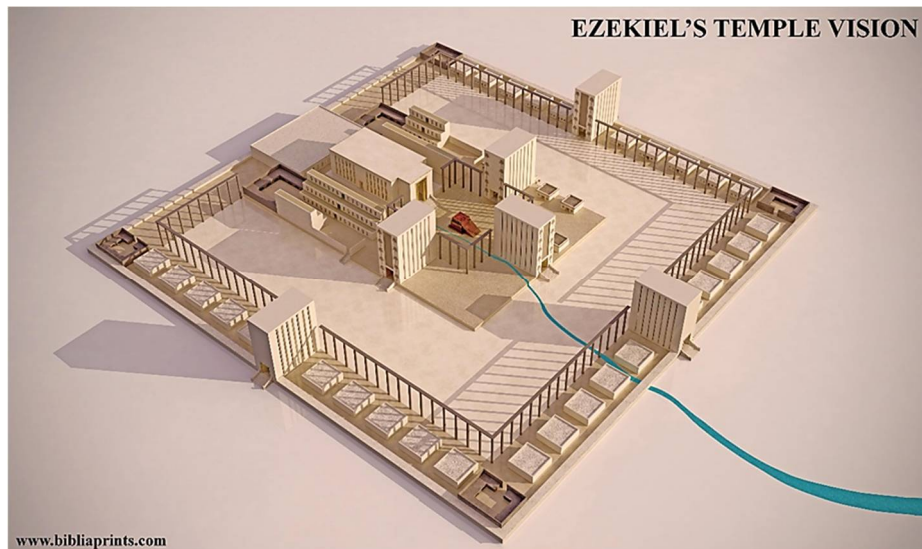
The millennial temple with sacrifices

There is little information given about the temple to be erected before the return of Christ, but there are many details given concerning the millennial temple. For this, we shall focus on Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48. The prophet Ezekiel was one of the Jews exiled to Babylon around 605 B.C. By the time he was prophesying, there was no longer a temple in Jerusalem, because the glorious structure constructed by King Solomon some 350 years or so earlier had been destroyed by the invading Babylonians around 585 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:16-19).

The temple itself:

From here on in this section, unless otherwise noted, quoted references in this text (such as "40:1" etc.) are taken from the book of Ezekiel. In the 25th year of Jewish captivity, Ezekiel was shown a vision of the future (40:1). Most of the details are quite specific, and are surely to be taken literally. With the aid of a spirit being (40:3), the prophet was shown a time when Israel would be back in her own land again. The borders are described in precise detail in 47:13 to 48:29, and include such easily recognisable physical reference points as Damascus, the Jordan River, Kadesh, and the Mediterranean Sea (referred to in ancient times as the Great Sea). Although the nation of Israel holds territory in the Middle East today, her present borders are quite different to those prophesied for the millennial kingdom.

Within that future land shall be a temple and surrounding priestly precinct. Pictured on the next page is one impression of what that millennial temple may look like:



Literal gateways and courts are described throughout chapters 40 to 48, all with specific physical attributes and dimensions. For example:

Then he [the man] brought me into the **sanctuary** and measured the doorposts, six cubits wide ... The doorposts of the **temple** were square, as was the front of the sanctuary ... The temple and the sanctuary had two doors ... Then he brought me to the outer gate of the sanctuary (41:1, 21, 23; 44:1, etc.)

Priests and offerings at the millennial sanctuary:

As we should expect, priests will be present in that future temple:

The chamber which faces south is for the **priests** who have charge of the temple. The chamber which faces north is for the **priests** who have charge of the altar (40:45, 46)

Also to be expected, sacrificial offerings will be presented there. Of particular relevance to our subject are detailed descriptions of the areas set aside for the slaughtering of animals destined for the sacrificial altar:

There was a chamber and its entrance by the gateposts of the gateway, where they washed the **burnt [approach] offering**. In the vestibule of the gateway were two tables on this side and two tables on that side, on which to slay **the burnt [approach] offering, the sin [purification] offering, and the trespass [reparation] offering**. At the outer side of the vestibule, as one goes up to the entrance of the northern gateway, were two tables; and on the other side of the vestibule of the gateway were two tables. Four tables were on this side and four tables on that side, by the side of the gateway, **eight tables on which they slaughtered the sacrifices**. There were also four tables of hewn stone for the burnt offering, one cubit and a half long, one cubit and a half wide, and one cubit high; on these they laid **the instruments with which they slaughtered the burnt [approach] offering and the sacrifice**. Inside were hooks, a handbreadth wide, fastened all around; and **the flesh of the sacrifices** was on the tables. (40:38-43)



“There were also four tables of hewn stone ... on these they laid the instruments with which they slaughtered the burnt [approach] offering and the sacrifice.”

Ezekiel 40:42

The north chambers and the south chambers, which are opposite the separating courtyard, are the holy chambers where the **priests who approach the LORD shall eat the most holy offerings**. There they shall lay the most holy offerings - **the grain [tribute] offering, the sin [purification] offering, and the trespass [reparation] offering** - for the place is holy. (42:13)

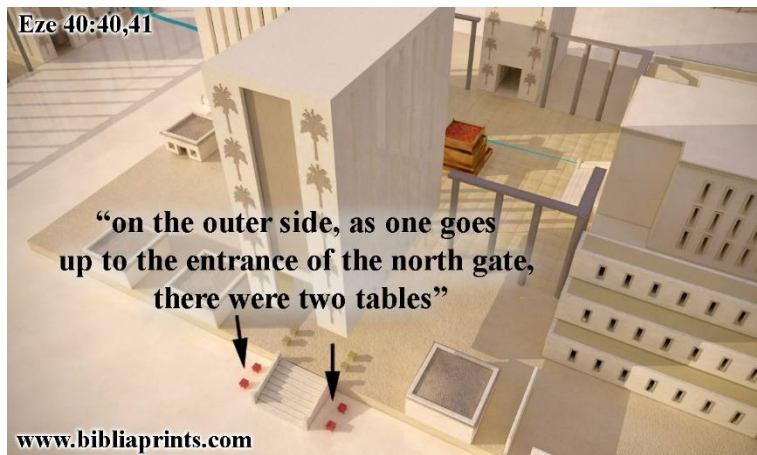
There a place was situated at their extreme western end. And he said to me, “This is the place where the priests shall boil **the trespass [reparation] offering and the sin [purification] offering**, and where they shall bake **the grain [tribute] offering**, so that they do not bring them out into the outer court to sanctify the people.” Then he brought me out into the outer court ... and cooking hearths were made under the rows of stones all around. And he said to me, “These are the kitchens where the ministers of the temple shall boil **the sacrifices** of the people.” (46:19b-24)

There shall also be an altar, the dimensions of which are given in cubits. (*As an approximate conversion guide: halve the number of cubits to get the measurement in metres. For example, 100 cubits is equal to about 50 metres.*) This is significant because, as we have previously discussed, altars are more than just memorial structures. They are sites at which sacrificial offerings take place:

And he measured the court, one hundred cubits long and one hundred cubits wide, foursquare. The **altar** was in front of the temple ... These are the measurements of the altar in cubits ... the base one cubit high and one cubit wide, with a rim all around its edge of one span. This is the height of the altar: from the base on the ground to the lower ledge, two cubits; the width of the ledge, one cubit; from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge, four cubits; and the width of the ledge, one cubit. The **altar hearth** is four cubits high, with four horns extending upward from the hearth. The altar hearth is twelve cubits long, twelve wide, square at its four corners; the ledge, fourteen cubits long and fourteen wide on its four sides, with a rim of half a cubit around it; its base, one cubit all around; and its steps face toward the east. (40:47; 43:13-17)

All sacrificial offerings were destined to be partly or wholly incinerated on an altar. In case we are tempted to think that this altar was symbolic or purely ornamental, we should read the quote above again and note how detailed the description is. Even more importantly, the Scriptures state its function quite plainly:

the altar ... is made, **for sacrificing** burnt [approach] offerings on it, and for sprinkling blood on it ... the priests shall offer your burnt [approach] offerings and your peace [completion] offerings on the altar. (43:18, 27)



The millennial altar and sacrifice preparation areas may appear as depicted here. The altar is the orange and brown object near the centre.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a once-only event (Hebrews 10:10). However, the future sacrifices will be offered repeatedly, especially the daily morning offering:

You shall **daily** make a burnt [approach] offering to the LORD of a lamb of the first year without blemish; you shall prepare it **every morning**. And you shall prepare a grain [tribute] offering with it **every morning**, a sixth of an ephah, and a third of a hin of oil to moisten the fine flour. This grain [tribute] offering is a **perpetual ordinance**, to be made **regularly** to the LORD. Thus they shall prepare the lamb, the grain [tribute] offering, and the oil, as a regular burnt [approach] offering **every morning**." (46:13-15)

The annual feasts, including their many sacrificial rituals detailed in Numbers chapters 28 and 29, will also be celebrated:

You shall observe the **Passover**, a feast of seven days; **unleavened bread** shall be eaten (45:21)

In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast [i.e. the **Feast of Tabernacles**], he shall do likewise for seven days, according to the sin [purification] offering, the burnt [approach] offering, the grain [tribute offering], and the oil. (45:25)

The role of Israel's civil ruler:

Of particular involvement in future festival commemorations will be a person described in most English translations as “the prince”.

Then it shall be the **prince's** part to give burnt [approach] offerings, grain [tribute] offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel. He shall prepare the sin [purification] offering, the grain [tribute] offering, the burnt [approach] offering, and the peace [completion] offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel. (45:17)

We are used to thinking of the term “prince” as referring to the son of a ruling monarch, such as is the case with most monarchies. For instance, at the time of writing, Prince Charles is the son of the ruling British monarch Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Frederik is the son of the ruling Danish monarch Margrethe II, and so on. The Bible definition of the term “prince” is somewhat different though, and we should take a moment to familiarise ourselves with its usage.

In the Old Testament, the term “king” is usually a translation of the Hebrew word *melek*, and almost always refers to a single leader of a nation, so there is little variance with our modern usage in that respect. The term “prince” in 45:17 and elsewhere in Ezekiel is a translation of *nasi'*, which is better translated more generically as “ruler” rather than “prince”, because this Hebrew word has variant meanings. The context of the passage usually indicates whether it is a nation's executive ruler, or a lower-ranked ruler with limited jurisdiction. For example, Numbers 2:3, 5, 7, 10, etc. lists each of Israel's 12 tribal “leaders” (KJV - “captains”) at the time of the exodus. This is the word *nasi'*, but clearly does not mean king or executive leader in that chapter.

Elsewhere, Ezekiel 37:24 prophesies of the millennium that “David My servant shall be king [*melek*] over them”, whilst the very next verse (v.25) tells us that “My servant David shall be their prince [*nasi'*] forever.” This demonstrates something of the broader meaning of *nasi'*. It is for this reason that many have suggested that a resurrected King David will indeed be the “prince” being spoken of in Ezekiel 45. In my opinion, this is possible but unlikely, partly due to the prophecy telling us that, at the Passover celebration:

the prince [*nasi'*] shall prepare **for himself** and for all the people of the land a bull for a sin [purification] offering. (45:22)

It seems improbable to me that a resurrected and immortal David would need to make a purification offering for himself. Therefore, I suggest that the *nasi'* of Ezekiel's prophecy will probably be akin to the chief civil leader or even a prime minister. If this is true, the hierarchy of government during the millennial kingdom could look something like this:

**... the “prince”
(Hebrew = ruler) will
probably be akin to the
chief civil leader or even
a prime minister ...**

- Christ - the LORD, the King of all kings of the earth (Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 17:14; 19:16; 1 Timothy 6:15)
- David, the King of Israel (Ezekiel 37:24)
- The prince / ruler / prime minister / chief civil leader (Ezekiel chs.45 & 46; 48:21,22)
- 12 apostles - one ruler of each of the 12 tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29,30)
- The rejuvenated nation of Israel - a kingdom of priests, mediating between God and the Gentile nations (1 Corinthians 6:2)

Of course, we are dealing with issues that are not clearly spelled out, so we would do well not to be too dogmatic about the hierarchy proposed above, nor the specific identity of the future civil leader in question. Indeed, there is much written in Ezekiel about this ruler that we will not touch upon, but let us briefly note a few aspects of particular relevance to the subject of offerings and sacrifices, and the role this civil leader may play.

As mentioned earlier, the civil leader shall be the people's representative "at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel" (45:17). We are given some more information about his involvement at three of the feasts in particular:

And on that day [i.e. Passover] the [nation's civil ruler] shall prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering. On the seven days of the feast [i.e. of Unleavened Bread] he shall prepare a burnt offering to the LORD, seven bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily for seven days, and a kid of the goats daily for a sin offering. ... In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast [i.e. of Tabernacles], he shall do likewise for seven days, according to the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the oil. (Ezekiel 45:22, 23, 25)

During these festivals, the civil leader will not be allowed to encroach on the priestly roles. In terms of worship and offering activities, in some ways he will be considered to be just as one of the common people, despite his high office:

The prince shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway from the outside, and stand by the gatepost. The priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings. He shall worship at the threshold of the gate ... The prince shall then be in their midst. When they go in, he shall go in; and when they go out, he shall go out. (46:2, 10)

A lot more could be said about this civil leader, but it would take us away from our main topic of discussion. The interested reader will find out more about the ruler (commonly called “the prince” in most Bible translations) by reading Ezekiel chapters 44 to 48.

Literal or to be taken figuratively?

One simple solution to the conundrum of future sacrifices would be to say that all of these things are a spiritual picture of what heaven will be like. That way, we wouldn’t be faced with the perceived “problem” of a literal priesthood slaughtering animals on a literal altar for sacrificial rituals that were supposed to have already had their fulfilment in Christ’ once-for-all sacrifice.

But how can such phrases be spiritualised, as if they represent something other than the tangible sacrificial processes with which we have familiarised ourselves? These accounts are especially notable because of the detailed particulars. Are the references to flesh hooks, tables of preparation, slaughtering and burning to

... These accounts are especially notable because of the detailed particulars. Are the references to be dismissed as mere imagery? The answer must be “No!” ...

be dismissed as mere imagery? Do the terms “daily”, “every morning”, “regularly” and “perpetual ordinance” really mean once only, therefore actually rendering them to be obsolete? Is the plainly stated sacrificial purpose of the altar to be construed to mean something different? Do the specific dimensions given in cubits have only symbolic value? The answer must be “No!” to each of these questions. It makes a mockery of God’s word to suggest that what is being described is heaven or some other equally spiritualised scenario. Everything about these final chapters of Ezekiel’s prophecy points towards the literal and regular offering of sacrifices in future times, whether or not we are able to grasp the reasoning.

It is not only the book of Ezekiel wherein we read that such things will be a reality. Further evidence of future offerings is also found in Zechariah’s prophecy:

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming ... Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations ... in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives ... thus the LORD my God will come ... It shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up **from year to year** to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and **to keep the Feast of Tabernacles**. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem ... they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up **to keep the Feast of Tabernacles**. (Zechariah 14:1, 3, 4, 5, 16-18)

Whilst the sanctuary, in all of its ancient forms, was standing, the Feast of Tabernacles was commemorated there with the sacrifice of almost 200 animals over an eight-day period (Numbers 29:12-38). There is nothing to suggest that this number will change when the

millennial temple is standing. If that festival is to be held, there can be no doubt that a multitude of sacrificial offerings shall take place.

Another prophet, Jeremiah, prophesied of a time still future, when God's law - the law that included regulations concerning the sanctuary, the priesthood and the sacrificial system - will be written on the hearts of a rejuvenated and reconciled Israel:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put **My law** in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:33)

We may be tempted to think that God's "law" in the future might be more akin to the suggested behaviour appropriate for Christians as set out in the New Testament epistles (e.g. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:31, 32). Whilst these exhortations are laws of a kind, from what we have seen in the Scriptures it appears that the laws for a restored Israel with Christ on the throne will indeed incorporate the more formal and tangible aspects of structured worship.

During the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah also prophesied concerning sacrificial practice:

‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth ... For thus says the LORD: ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to **offer burnt [approach] offerings** before Me, to **kindle grain [tribute] offerings**, and to **sacrifice** continually.’ (Jeremiah 33:14-18)

Was he referring to the time after the captivity, when Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, ruled over those Jews who returned to the land (Haggai 1:14, Matthew 1:12); or was he speaking of the millennial kingdom, over which Christ shall reign? Such is the nature of many Old Testament prophecies that perhaps these words are true of both eras. Time will tell.

Having established the fact of future sacrifices, it may be of interest to the reader to note that whilst priests are frequently mentioned in passages regarding the millennial temple, nowhere do we read of a future high priest. Perhaps the Lord did not see a reason to mention this prominent figure in the texts, or perhaps it is because Christ as High Priest (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14, 15; 7:26, etc.) will have made the human position obsolete once and for all. Despite difficulties we may have in understanding what will take place, the gist of the matter is this. The evidence of Scripture, from several different prophets, if taken literally, overwhelmingly supports the notion that the offering of sacrifices will be practised in the future, both before and during the time of the millennial kingdom.

The Acts Period a foretaste of the future millennial kingdom

We are not without examples of believers in Bible times offering sacrifices well after the time of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice. Indeed, it was quite common for them to do so during the period of 30 years or so after His crucifixion, a phase that is covered by the book of Acts. That era is often referred to as the Acts period.

In this regard, it may help us to think of the Acts period as a foretaste of the millennial kingdom, and to take note of the sacrificial practices of early Christian believers, both Jewish and Gentile. The circumstances of each period are not exactly the same, but our study of future sacrifices would probably be incomplete if we ignored what was taking place during the period covered by the book of Acts. This is because it was a time when, despite being already reconciled to God through forgiveness of sin and sins by placing their faith in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, many of these same people were still also presenting sacrificial offerings, and were apparently not acting contrary to God's will in doing so.

Significantly, Gentile believers of the Acts period were never required to observe the Mosaic Law with its sacrifices, for it was never given to non-Israelites:

Speak to the children of **Israel**, and say to them: "When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock" (Leviticus 1:2)

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people" ... These are the words which you shall speak to the children of **Israel**. (Exodus 19:5, 6)

The second passage quoted above emphasises that one of the goals of the Law was to distinguish Israelites as a nation that had a special role in God's dealings. Hence, when the obligations of Gentile Christian converts were debated at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) 1400 years or so after the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai, Peter successfully argued that the Gentile Christian believers should not be burdened with the "yoke" of the law (v.10). At the same gathering, James determined that "we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" (v.19 NIV). Should a Gentile have wished to present a sacrificial offering for some reason, they would not have been permitted to approach the altar anyway. Indeed, the temple standing in those days displayed signage warning of impending death for any Gentile who might venture too close to the designated holy areas. Consider the uproar caused when it was thought that Gentiles had entered into a zone of the temple precinct forbidden for them (Acts 21:28), and it becomes apparent that, even if they had wanted to, a non-Israelite would have found it impossible to offer an animal sacrifice on the appointed altar.

For Jewish believers, it was a different matter, and it is a fact often disregarded that the Law with its sacrifices was generally kept by the earliest Jewish Christian believers during the Acts period. For instance, in Jerusalem, Paul was asked to help four young men to be released from what was

... Paul was asked to help four young men to be released from a Nazirite vow. This process involved required Paul to offer sacrifices on their behalf ...

probably a Nazirite vow (Acts 21:26; cp. Numbers 6:13-21). This process required Paul to offer sacrifices on their behalf, and he readily agreed to do this upon the urging of another Jewish Christian, James, to prove to Paul's detractors that it was still his practice to "keep the Law" (Acts 21:24). Earlier, Paul, being in Ephesus, expressed a need to travel to Jerusalem so as to attend one of the mandatory festivals of the Law, each of which included a great deal of sacrificial offering (Acts 18:19-21; cp Exodus 34:22, 23; Numbers 28 & 29). Moreover, other Jewish believers such as John and Barnabas (Acts 13:2, 5) would surely not have been permitted to preach in synagogues if they were not observant of the Law.

Jewish Christians were never told to cease observing the Mosaic Law. Further to this, **they were not condemned for observing it**, and the consistently amazing outworking of the Holy Spirit amongst the church of the Acts period is testament to this. The same apostles who were unashamedly conforming to the requirements of the Law were also being enabled by God to perform miraculous deeds through the power of His Holy Spirit at the same time (e.g. Acts 3:1-10; 19:11, 12; etc.). Just as Christ was "a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did through Him" (Acts 2:22), the messages of the apostles

were likewise accompanied by such wondrous deeds, showing that their teaching was approved of by God.

... Jewish Christians were never told to cease observing the Mosaic Law. Further to this, they were not condemned for doing so ...

These people were Jewish Christian believers; i.e. people who had put their faith in the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, they continued to also observe the Mosaic Law during the Acts

period. Their sacrificial activity had nothing to do with seeking atonement for the purpose of salvation, though, but was more to do with their role as blessed Israelite Christians who had already put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall explore this aspect further shortly, when we consider the purpose of future sacrifices.

Whilst it was not necessary for Gentiles to keep the Law in those days, there does seem to be allowance for Gentiles to offer sacrifices in the future millennial sanctuary:

"Also the sons of the **foreigner** who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants - Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and **holds fast My covenant**, even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. **Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar**; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him." (Isaiah 56:6-8)

However, note that these non-Israelites will need to "hold fast My covenant". In other words, any Gentile seeking to present sacrificial offerings will effectively have to become Israelites first; i.e. proselytes. The same was true for those Gentiles who travelled with the Israelites in Moses' day. If they wanted to partake of the blessings of Israel, they had to become circumcised (Exodus 12:44, 48), observe the weekly Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-10), keep the annual festivals (e.g. Exodus 12:43-49; Deuteronomy 16:10-14); and so on. This was the case

for Gentiles in Old Testament times, and also in the days covered by the New Testament before the conversion of Cornelius, after which God began to pour out His Holy Spirit upon Gentiles independently of Israel (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-18). As for the future millennium, we find the same principle at work, and it becomes quite clear who will and will not be offering sacrifices when we consider again the prophecy of Ezekiel:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “**No foreigner**, uncircumcised in heart or **uncircumcised in flesh**, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel.” (Ezekiel 44:9)

In comparing the sacrificing during the period Acts with that to be carried out during the millennium, the parallel is unmistakeable and one conclusion is clear. Jewish and proselyte believers at that future time will observe sacrificial offering, and all with God’s stamp of approval upon the process.

(2) The Purpose of Future Sacrifices

Establishing the reality of the future sacrifices is one thing; determining their role and purpose is quite another. Let us be frank and begin by saying that the reasons for offerings being presented in the future are not greatly elaborated upon in Scripture. Only God truly knows the full reasoning, and that is perhaps the plainest fact of which we can be sure!

Whilst there are only a few hints here and there, an attempt to understand their purpose is far from being a waste of time. Such an effort need not be overly laden with speculation; indeed, the Scriptures have shown us why offerings were sacrificed in times past, and a study of these shall surely prove to be helpful in attempting to understand the rationale and objectives of future sacrifice, too.

As we commence, it will help to remember that there will be at least two different temples to stand in the future: one before Christ’s return, and another after His return - see the chart at the beginning of this chapter. Because the circumstances of each differ, we shall consider the role of sacrificial offerings in these two temples separately.

(a) The Role of Sacrifices Before Christ’s return

Whilst the Bible does not set out the reasons for the recommencement of sacrificial offering before the return of Christ, it is clear that there will be a temple standing, and that sacrifices will take place there. Scripture does not record any command to build a temple before Christ’s return, so whilst this reconstruction may be God-ordained, it may simply be a humanly instituted phenomenon, which God allows to take place in order to fulfil His purposes.

Presently the construction of a future temple faces a major difficulty. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is currently occupied by several Islamic buildings. Whilst the previous temple’s

precise location on the mount is a matter of debate, there can be no getting around the fact that the site is presently dominated by Muslim forces vehemently opposed to the erection of a Jewish temple anywhere in the vicinity.



The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, currently occupied by Islamic structures, the most dominant being Qubbat al-Şakhrah (The Dome of the Rock).

It seems that as-yet-unknown future events, miraculous or merely circumstantial, will allow the rebuilding of a Jewish temple to take place at some point. Perhaps the pre-millennial temple will be established by well-meaning but non-believing Israelis, especially Orthodox Jews who wish to observe the Mosaic Law but still reject Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. Today, there are several entities associated with what is sometimes called the “Temple Movement”, whose goal is to see the construction of the “Third Temple” (the “First” being that constructed by Solomon; the “Second” being that constructed by Zerubbabel and later refurbished by Herod). Suffice to say, a number of interested parties have already begun to make preparations for the rebuilding of the temple and the resumption of sacrificial worship practices.

Ezekiel chapters 42, 43 and 44 contain many God-inspired instructions about what should and should not take place in the later millennial temple; however, no such instructions are associated with the temple before Christ’s return. It seems to me that the “Third Temple” and its worship shall be established more by the desire of the proponents of Judaism than by anyone else. Whether this is God’s will, or merely something that will be permitted and has been foreseen by Him, is a matter for debate. If this proposition is true, the sacrifices shall be carried out in the temple before Christ’s return primarily because **those who will perform them will believe that they are faithfully observing the Mosaic Law**. It seems to me that the people who will be responsible for constructing the Third Temple will only do it because they believe that the fullest expression of their faith requires a temple to be rebuilt.

Having considered a potential reason behind the sacrifices of times to come before Christ’s return, let us now turn our attention to the sacrifices of the millennial kingdom.

(b) The Role of Sacrifices After Christ's return

Whilst it may be difficult to ascertain whether it is God or humans who will ordain the recommencement of offerings before Christ's return, there is little doubt that God will endorse the presentation of sacrifices carried out for the 1000 years after that momentous event. As we saw earlier, the numerous descriptions of offerings and places for sacrificial activity in the prophecies of the Bible show this to be a certainty. Let us now attempt to address the obvious question: If Christ's sacrifice 2000 years ago was "once-for-all" (Hebrews 10:10), and it fulfilled the types set forth in the Law (see Chapter 16 of this book), what possible motive/s could God have for wanting sacrifices to be resumed in the future?

I would suggest that there are at least five possible reasons for carrying out sacrifices in the millennial kingdom: (1) to make atonement for Israel; (2) to bring about awareness of sin; (3) to commemorate Christ's sacrifice; (4) to be a witness to the Gentile nations; and (5) to instruct the world at large regarding the principles of having a right relationship with God. We shall now consider each one of these possibilities in turn.

1. To make atonement for Israel:

At least one reason for future sacrifices is clearly stated in the Bible:

It shall be the prince's [or civil leader's] part to give burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel. He shall prepare the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings **to make atonement for the house of Israel.** (Ezekiel 45:17)

So the short answer to the question of why sacrifices will be carried out in the millennial kingdom is, "to make atonement for the house of Israel". Of course, this raises a number of questions, such as "Why would a rejuvenated and reconciled Israel require atonement?". It may be difficult to come to a definitive conclusion about this, but let us make an attempt to address a few of the relevant issues.

Israel's priests of the millennium will continue to present the daily morning approach offering on behalf of the nation (46:13-15), which suggests an ongoing need for atonement at a national level. Although a lot can be said about the millennial kingdom, in reality we don't know beyond doubt what will be the exact makeup of people in the earthly kingdom in that time. Certainly, many of its citizens will have been resurrected, including people such as Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-10, 39, 40), David (Psalm 17:15; Ezekiel 37:21-28), Moses and Elijah (seen in the vision of the future kingdom upon the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:3-9), as well as more generally speaking, a host of faithful Old Testament figures (Hebrews ch.11), "those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:22-25), and probably many others not mentioned in that list. However, through a number of circumstances, there may be many people living in the kingdom at that time who, for purposes known only to God at this point, shall require the animal sacrifices to be presented

for their atonement. Some individuals may be there who have not placed their faith in the saving blood of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth - perhaps not through refusal, but maybe through ignorance or lack of opportunity to do so. It could be that such a company renders even the “saved” Israel, as a whole, in need of atonement at a national level. This suggestion could prove to be way off the mark, but it is helpful to remind ourselves that, somehow, sacrifices will be presented **“to make atonement for the house of Israel”**.

As observed earlier, the civil leader in the future kingdom is said to present offerings on behalf of the nation’s people on certain occasions such as the weekly Sabbath day (46:4, 5) the monthly “New Moon” (46:6, 7) and at each of the annual commemorative occasions (46:9-12). Notably, at Passover, it is said that he will be required to “prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering” (Ezekiel 45:22) and likewise during the Feast of Tabernacles (v.25). In some respects this leader will be considered to be just as one of the common people (Ezekiel 45:10), so it seems as if he will be representing them by bringing offerings.

The issue of presenting offerings for atonement brings to mind the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies of ancient times, whereby purification offerings were made on behalf of the nation to ensure that all individual acts of sin or impurity were covered, so that they would not be a potential obstacle to the nation’s fellowship with God (Leviticus 16:15, 21, 22, 30). Likewise, with the consecration ceremonies of the priests, purification offerings were presented, not because of some specifically stated sin or declared state of impurity, but almost as a precautionary measure; an offering carried out “just in case” any problematic impurities had not been previously dealt with. We also see such examples associated with the dedication ceremonies of leaders and officials (as discussed in Chapter 12 of this book, and in Chapter 8 under the subsection titled, “Undefined sins under the Mosaic Law”).

Interestingly, it is the “prince” (the civil leader) who is said to bring the offerings on commemorative occasions, whilst the “king” is never said to do so. If the king of that earthly kingdom is David, it seems unlikely to me that he would have a need to prepare offerings for himself, being one of the resurrected faithful, no longer subject to the sting of death or sin (1 Corinthians 15:55, 56).

... the millennial kingdom will be very good, but not perfect ...

Another factor to consider is that the millennial kingdom will be very good, but not perfect. That period will be godlier in character than any time since the fall of Genesis 3, but not to the same level of perfection as the New Jerusalem that follows it (Revelation 21:1, 27). In the millennium, Israel as a nation will be rejuvenated and have the law written in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34), but the kingdom’s citizens - or at least some of them - will still apparently be prone to imperfection:

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying ... the child shall **die** one hundred years old, but the **sinner** being one hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isaiah 65:19, 20)

Again, the presence of “death” and “sin” in that reference to the future further emphasises the point that, while the millennial kingdom will be good, it will not be perfect. Revelation 21:1-22:5 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 both speak of the millennial kingdom not being the final stage in God’s dealings with mankind, and that sinless perfection is a state to come to pass after that time. For the purpose of keeping to our subject, though, we shall by-pass a more detailed discussion on that particular aspect.

Like all prophecies, I’m sure it will be much easier to see how the prophetic passages of sacrifices in Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48 pan out once they have come to pass! At present, it seems a difficult (perhaps impossible) task to make accurate predictions about each detail and purpose whilst these things are still future. Even if we cannot be certain of all the motives, we may confidently cling to what has been plainly stated, i.e. that one of the reasons for the resumption of future sacrifices during the millennial kingdom is “to make atonement for the house of Israel”, whatever the exact cause behind it.

2. To bring about awareness of sin:

The presence of tangible animal sacrifices had at least one very positive effect in the eras of the Old Testament, the Gospel period and the Acts period. During the ancient times of the tabernacle and the two temples, the Israelites were very aware that they were sinners falling short of God’s standards. This was due, in no small way, to the regularity of the sacrificial routine. Twice a day, every day of the year, an approach offering for atonement was presented by the priests on behalf of all Israelites (Exodus 29:38-42; Leviticus 1:3, 4). People of all classes from that nation were conscious that they were sinners, even if some forgot from time to time.

Take the example of the woman who was accused of adultery and brought before the Lord Jesus to test Him regarding His response (John 8:2-9). The scribes and Pharisees gathered and wanted to have her stoned, but when Christ’s answer was, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (v.7), they all walked away. Not even the most pious amongst them could say “I am without sin”. To be fair, they must have believed that their actions were generally sinless, as evidenced by the question put to the Lord’s disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and **sinners**?” (Matthew 9:11), as if they themselves were not such. Interestingly, the Lord later told His disciples that “the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Matthew 26:45), of whom the Pharisees were a part. Nevertheless, His enemies knew that the daily approach offering represented them and sought atonement. They also would have been very aware of what the Day of Atonement itself (Leviticus 16), with its sin offerings, was all about: namely, the sin of everyone in the nation, regardless of status or position. These ceremonies were regular and all-inclusive, and a constant open reminder of the shortcomings of all humans before God.

Later, during the Acts period, Paul would write:

by the law is the **knowledge of sin** (Romans 3:20).

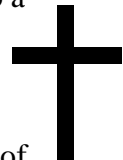
I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ (Romans 7:7)

The Law described to Israel what was and was not acceptable to God; i.e. what constituted sin. Hence, Paul could say, “I would not have known sin except through the law”. The words of the Law made the people aware of their sin, and the regularity of the sacrifices in ancient times served as a visible reminder of a person’s sin, as well as of God’s grace in providing ways to atone for that sin.

Perhaps the offering of future sacrifices will serve a similar purpose: a tangible physical display and reminder of how “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Of course, the sacrifices found their fulfilment - i.e. their fullest meaning - in Christ (Matthew 5:17), and it seems that a person will still need to express faith in Him to be atoned from their personal sin. His “once for all” sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10) will continue to be sufficient for salvation, but the sacrifices may assist to remind people that they each still have a fallen nature (the “sin that dwells in me” - Romans 7:20), despite the wonderful fact that righteousness has been imputed to those who believe in Him (Romans 4:24). To be clear, it is not being suggested that a person will need to offer sacrifices to secure salvation; rather, that the future offering process might be a visible teaching tool and memory aid demonstrating some of the principles of having a relationship with God.

3. To commemorate Christ’s sacrifice:

In addition to the expressions of one’s desire to be right before God, there was also a commemorative element at play in sacrificial activity in ancient times. Certainly, the approach- and purification offerings sought atonement; if carried out to the letter and in the spirit of the law, they were effective in achieving their goal. However, there were several ceremonies involving sacrifices that were a reminder of God’s great deeds carried out in past times.



The observance of Passover was one such ceremony. This festival was celebrated annually from the time the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land (Joshua 5:10-12). In repeatedly memorializing the first Passover night (Exodus chapter 12), the nation wasn’t continually seeking to have the slaying of their firstborn averted, as was the case just before leaving Egypt. Rather, the purpose was to remind them of how God had saved them in the early days of their nationhood:

This day shall be to you a **memorial**; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. (Exodus 12:14)

Therefore you shall **sacrifice** the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd (Deuteronomy 16:2)

The continued commemoration of Passover, along with its associated sacrificed lamb, had nothing to do with seeking atonement. Instead it was a festival of remembrance.

Turning now to future sacrifices in general, it appears that one role will be to point back to what Christ has already done. To be more precise, it seems that they will be commemorative rather than effective. Referring to the Day of Atonement, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us that “in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year” (Hebrews 10:3). In a similar way but looking to the future, Christ’s sacrifice has already done what needed to be done, but future sacrifices may be a tangible and visible way of memorializing this wonderful event. In Old Testament times, the sacrifices were also prospective, looking forward to Christ’s redemptive act; perhaps in the future, sacrificial offerings will be more retrospective.

4. To be a witness to the Gentile nations:

At this point, it would be helpful to recall one reason why the Mosaic Law was instituted. During the era that God was dealing primarily with Israel as a special nation differently to others, the Law, including its sacrificial system, was to be a demonstration to the other nations that the one true God was with Israel:

Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I [i.e. Moses] teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. ... Therefore **be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples** who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And **what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law** which I set before you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:1, 6-8)

In that light, it is clear that the sacrificial system had a role at a national level. Whilst the offerings were only for Israelites and never for Gentiles, the keeping of the Law with its sacrifices was to be a witness to the surrounding nations. Ideally, Israel would always have been obedient to God’s commands, and tangibly and visibly blessed as a result (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), to the point where the surrounding Gentile nations would recognise the greatness of the one true God and exclaim, “what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD!” (Deuteronomy 4:7). In reality, Israel’s obedience to God was patchy and inconsistent at best. During those times that they were being faithful, they were blessed both materially and in other ways, and this was a demonstration to the nations that God was with Israel. For instance, the foreign Queen of Sheba observed King Solomon’s wisdom and prosperity, thereafter exclaiming, “Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you!” (1 Kings 10, 7, 9).

During the future millennial kingdom, it becomes apparent that God will be treating Israel differently to the surrounding nations again. Open displays of His dealings with that restored and blessed nation will be a witness to the Gentile nations once more.

The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore. (Ezekiel 37:28)

Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also." Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD ... In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for **we have heard that God is with you.**" (Zechariah 8:20-23)

The sacrifices and their teaching will highlight once again that God is dealing with Israel differently to other nations at that time, and that He has chosen that nation as His own for His special purposes. This aspect of witness is further borne out in the next point.

5. To instruct the world regarding the principles of having a right relationship with God:

As an extension to the previous point, there will probably be an instructional element to sacrifices in the future, as well. In the same way that theology teachers, books and online sites attempt to explain various aspects of today's Christian faith, something similar may take place in the millennial kingdom. Once again, we read of people from Gentile nations who will make their way to the restored land of Israel to seek the Lord :

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; **He will teach us His ways**, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:1, 2)

In contrast to the inevitably imperfect tuition of mere mortals (including this author!), it appears that Christ Himself, the Living Word, will instruct the surrounding nations or their representatives about the ways of God. The emphasis is on how they should live, but it is easy to imagine that some enlightenment about the sacrifices would also be included in that instruction. A close look at sacrificial offerings, with the perfect Guide at hand to explain their meanings and nuances, would surely help to emphasise important lessons about the sinful state of mankind, how one should approach God in order to have fellowship with Him, the necessity of Christ's death in our place, and more.

At the time when God-ordained offerings will be in operation again, human beings will still only need to have faith in Jesus of Nazareth as their Saviour, to be right before God, but

perhaps the sacrifices will be a way of teaching the nuances of Christ's sacrificial work to the majority of people who will probably know little or nothing of these things - just like today!

Concluding thoughts

It must be admitted that there are several aspects of this subject about which we cannot be absolutely conclusive, and when all is said and done, only God knows exactly how things yet to come will truly pan out. Consider how many prophetic statements about Christ were given in the Old Testament, and then compare that with how little the people really understood of Him when it came time for Him to walk the earth. With hindsight, we can often see how certain prophecies were fulfilled, but it is much more difficult to accurately predict details of prophetic utterance **before** they take place!

Nevertheless the phenomenon of future sacrifices is overtly present in the Scriptures, and it seems intended by God that we should read the relevant passages and become aware of them. This chapter has been one attempt to comprehend something of God's Word. May our study of these things be not merely academic however, but that which seeks to better understand our Lord and His ways. May He be glorified through our contemplation of these complex, and often mysterious, matters.

Chapter 18: Some Applications for Today

We draw our study of the offerings towards a close with a consideration of what we might be able to apply to our lives from what we have learnt. 2 Timothy 3:16 reminds us that “All Scripture ... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”. An important part of studying all aspects of God’s Word is to understand the doctrines and concepts presented. It is equally as important to be able to think about how these same truths may apply to our own lives and situations. After all, the phrase about all Scripture being profitable is followed by words indicating the goal of that profit: “... that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (v.17).



The Levitical laws, with all of their rituals and complexities, are included in “all Scripture”, and are therefore also “profitable” for us. Whilst those laws had their primary meaning and application for those to whom they were originally addressed, they also provided examples for the beneficial instruction of those who would read about them centuries later (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). In the introduction to this book, the suggestion was made that we will make better applications if we first take the time to become familiar with the principles and processes of Biblical offerings. Having covered a number of these, it is time to think about how we might relate them to the standing and walk of the modern-day Christian.

The thoughts presented in this chapter are certainly not exhaustive, and the reader will most likely discover some aspect of the offering process not discussed that could apply to his or her own spiritual journey. You are encouraged to prayerfully ponder these things beyond the bounds of the initial thoughts presented here. We shall consider them in two categories: applications based on offerings in general, followed by applications based specifically on the five main offering types.

Some applications for today, based on offerings and offerings procedures in general

God’s requirements of man:

The offering system, particularly under the Mosaic Law, was full of regulations. We have looked at some of them, but there are literally hundreds that we have not examined. God set forth many requirements of the ancient Israelites in order for them to be right before Him and walk in ways pleasing to Him.

In one sense, what God requires of mankind has never changed. If humans want to be reconciled to God, have fellowship with God and enjoy God's blessings, they must meet God's requirements. This is not an overly legalistic statement; it is simply the way things are. In ancient times, the offering system was one of God's requirements of mankind. Today, that system has been superseded by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

... In ancient times, the offering system was one of God's requirements of mankind. Today, that system has been superseded by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ...

Jesus said ... "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5)

This is God's universe, and He has the prerogative to set its governing principles. He has stipulated certain criteria for mankind to be reconciled to Him and to have life after resurrection. His requirements will not be compromised or negotiated. For the Christian, this means placing our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled God's requirements on our behalf. All we have to do is believe it and accept it!

For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not of works**, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

God's requirements of the Christian believer:

God had many requirements of the Israelites, who were essentially supposed to be a holy people, reconciled to Him. They weren't always faithful in their walk, but they were still "God's people".

To what extent have you thought about God's requirements for the Christian today? We can easily look to God and ask what He might be able to do for us, without considering that God may have His own demands. Even in secular circles it is not unusual to hear phrases like, "God, help me!", "Lord, give me (such and such)", and so on. If that is the extent of a person's relationship to God, it reduces Him to a kind of Santa Claus whereby, if the desire is not granted, the person no longer has any need for relating to Him. There is a danger that God may be seen as having a role in our lives only if He is of "use" to us. This is a complete reversal of the way God's scheme of things actually works.

Let us remember our place before God. We are God's creation; He is not our creation. As discussed above, there is a certain requirement for salvation: faith in Jesus Christ. For the person who has taken that step, there are further requirements, though not for salvation. We are exhorted to "therefore ... walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1).

Attempting a worthy walk is hindered by a major problem. Even if we are Christians, every person still has the fallen sinful nature. The apostle Paul expressed his own personal struggle like this:

What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do ... For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So, I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. (Romans 7:15-21 NIV)

Sin is still there with us and affects us. Thankfully, it will not be held against us regarding our salvation. Disobedience to God's will may not jeopardise our standing with God, for we are saved by faith and not works (Ephesians 2:8, 9). However, we run the risk of grieving Him with poor behaviour (Ephesians 4:30), and, just as there is the possibility of rewards for faithful work, there will be recompense for unfaithful work:

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the **reward** of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But **he who does wrong will be repaid** for what he has done, and there is no partiality. (Colossians 3:23-25)

The Colossians 3 passage quoted above is part of Paul's letter addressed to "saints and faithful brethren" (Colossians 1:2), so it is not talking about good or bad people working to earn salvation; nor is it referring to believer and unbeliever. Rather, the focus is on the walk of the person already saved; i.e. the walk of "the saints and faithful". The verses throughout Colossians chapters 3 and 4 are all written in the same vein, with the same readership in mind. The way the Christian walks really does matter to God, as evidenced by Paul's own example, written shortly before his death:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **Finally, there is laid up for me the crown** of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day ... (2 Timothy 4:7, 8)

It was not Paul's initial salvation, but his subsequent walk, that earned him this "crown of righteousness". The exact format of that crown and its significance is a matter for debate, but it does appear to be a reward. What God's estimation will be of our walk, and whether we shall be granted some kind of reward, we need to leave up to Him. For our part though, we can heed the many instructions, particularly in the latter portions of most New Testament letters, giving us a good idea of what sort of behaviour is and isn't pleasing to Him; to "understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). These are God's specified requirements of the Christian today.

Why certain regulations?

We may wonder about why God's Law contained so many intricate instructions about how offerings were to be made, and under what circumstances. Frankly, it is just about impossible to ascertain exactly why some particular regulations were put in place. For example, honey was never to be burnt on the altar with any offering (Leviticus 2:11), and most grain-based offerings were to contain no leaven, but some were to include it (Leviticus 2:4 cp. 23:17). I have a few ideas about why such laws may have been instituted, but I cannot say for certain. Some commentators have offered their ideas and a number of them are worthy of consideration. Significantly, no explanations are ever provided in the Bible to give the reader insight as to the reasons for these specific decrees. Even though it may be worth pondering over what the reasons behind those unexplained laws were, the more important principle is that certain directives were given in the Law, and it was up to people to obey them. Some were explained, and some were not. It was God's prerogative to institute whatever laws He saw fit to declare. It was also His prerogative to explain His reasoning or to keep silent on the matter.

It is not wrong to wonder about the reasons behind certain regulations, but it is no disgrace for us to say that we don't really understand some of the reasons either. Many contradictory suppositions have been arrived at by well-meaning Christians through hasty speculation of God's Word, or simply because it was felt that some explanation was necessary. Unless plainly stated in the Scriptures, we should qualify any such conclusions with the notion that we may not always correctly understand God's reasoning:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

His understanding is infinite. (Psalm 147:5)

These verses should give us even greater cause to heed the advice given in Proverbs 3:5 - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding". The prime lesson here is to believe and obey the word of God, even if we are not always able to fathom the reasons behind some of its exhortations.

Relationships:

The offering system was largely about relationships, and the main relationship addressed was that of a person to God. When a person presented a sacrificial offering, they were really presenting an expression of their thoughts to God. The purification offering expressed the desire to be right before Him; the completion offerings were expressions of those who were already right with God, and so on. The other ritual offerings each had their place in this way (see Chapter 10: The Sequence of Offerings).

Our relationships to God and one another matter. When asked which was the greatest commandment in the Law, Christ's answer was:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. (Matthew 22:37, 38)

Further to this, He added: "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (v.39). Lest we think that this has nothing to do with the sacrificial rituals, let us remember that He went on to say, "On these **two commandments** hang all the Law and the Prophets" (v.40). That same Law and the Prophets have plenty to say about offerings and sacrifices.

So, the idea of the offerings being about relationships primarily concerned a person's standing with God, but also extended to an Israelite's connection with other Israelites under the Law. Of special relevance were the reparation and completion offering offerings, each of which contained elements demanding a right relationship with other individuals.

Through Christ's one sacrifice, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1), but that is just the starting point. After that, there is our ongoing walk before God, including our dealings with our fellow human beings, and each is of great importance. Consider the content of the New Testament epistles. In these are found great doctrinal truths about our God, and what Christ has done for us. Of equal measure are the exhortations for Christians to care for one another, put others first, and to behave in ways that demonstrate this.

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is an excellent example of this. A letter divided into six chapters, the first three chapters speak largely of what God has done for us (e.g. "By grace you have been saved" - 2:8); and is balanced by the final three chapters encouraging behaviour that is appropriate and considerate of others (e.g. "I therefore ... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness, gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" - 4:1, 2).

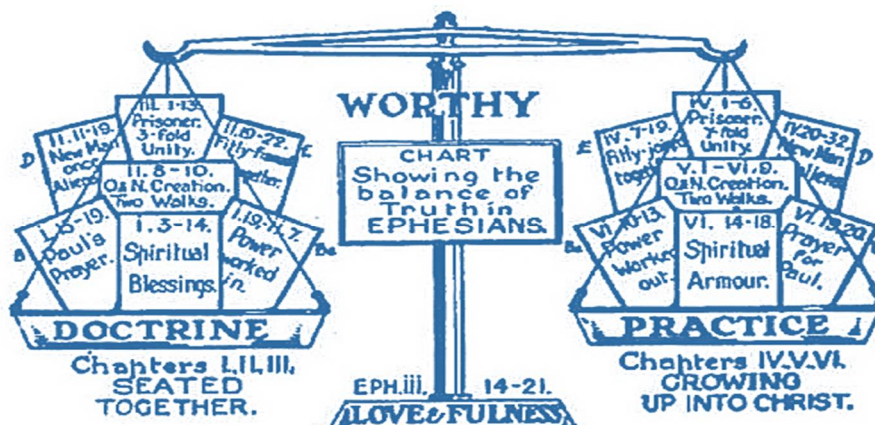


Illustration by Charles H. Welch, depicting the balance between doctrinal and practical teaching in the epistle to the Ephesians.

It matters how we relate to fellow believers, even those who may attend a different church denomination, those with whom we may disagree on some point of doctrine, or those who seem to have a "difficult" personality. We may not always be able to change the manners and

beliefs of our fellow believers, but we always have a choice in determining our attitude towards those people.

Provision:

The sacrificial offering system was not a system of fines and penalties. Rather, it was God's method of providing ways for mankind to be reconciled to Him, so that close fellowship with Him might be enjoyed and lived out. Christ's sacrificial offering was, perhaps, God's greatest provision (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10; Galatians 1:3, 4; 2:20; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6. See also the subsection in Chapter 16, titled "The Provision of God"). If a person hasn't taken up the offer of salvation through Christ, they really need to.

God has consistently reached out to His creation. The following words from the Scriptures were originally spoken to Israel in the context of national disobedience, but I can't help thinking that this statement might well be said of each one of us:

All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.
(Romans 10:21)

Humans can be a stubborn lot. It could well be said that, even for us Christians who have gone as far as placing our faith in Christ as our substitute, we haven't always chosen to embrace all of God's provisions. There is a need for us to recognise the tendency of our inherent sinful nature; indeed, it is natural for humans to reject the outstretched hand of God. Let us remind ourselves of Paul's own struggles with this (Romans 7:14-25):

What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (v.15 NIV)

I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. (v.19 NIV)

It is human nature for us to want to go our own way, but it is pleasing to God for us to listen for His guidance and heed it. God has not only provided the means of reconciliation to Him through the sacrificial gift of the Lord Jesus Christ; He has also provided His Holy Spirit to indwell us, guide us and give us the inner strength to walk in ways pleasing to Him (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). Again, the following words originally directed to Israel are relevant in their application to the modern-day Christian:

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts ..." (Hebrews 3:7, 8 cp. Psalm 95:7, 8)

Despite this, let us exercise caution regarding the phrase, "if you will hear His voice". All sorts of ridiculous acts have been carried on the premise that "God told me to do such and such". Anything from "God told me to buy that car", to "God told me to kill that blasphemer", and so on. Some of these actually seem to be quite contrary to the ways that God has revealed He operates today, so the question of how God leads the believer through

His gracious provision of the Holy Spirit is an important one. Thankfully, the Bible suggests several ways.



Firstly, God guides the believer today via the Holy-Spirit-inspired Scriptures. They are there for our guidance (2 Timothy 3:16,17), and the Holy Spirit may enlighten us about them as we read (1 Corinthians 2:11,14).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit also provides direct assistance in several ways: giving the believer wisdom and discernment to know, not only about the riches of our future, but also about the power that is at work in us now (Ephesians 1:15-20; Philippians 1:9,10). Guidance may be imparted to know how to walk worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:9,10). We may be given strength in our inner being (Colossians 1:11; Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:13) to carry out that worthy walk (Colossians 1:10; Philippians 1:11). Importantly, we can be certain that these forms of spiritual guidance will never be at odds with the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. The challenge for us is to discern what is truly the will of God consistent with the Bible, and what is only just us telling ourselves what we want to hear.

God's provisions have never been forced upon anyone. It's my belief that if we don't want the help and guidance that God wishes to provide for us, or we choose to ignore it, it is unlikely to be forced upon us. Most of us own a Bible, but how often do we read it? Every Christian has God's Holy Spirit dwelling within, but how often do we heed, or even seek, His guidance? What is being suggested is that we must recognise the need for God's assistance in our Christian walk, lean not on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5), and allow His Spirit to guide our lives in some of the ways suggested above. It is appropriate that we acknowledge and embrace the many and great provisions of God in our lives.

Sacrifice:

The sacrificing of animals was an integral part of the offering system, and I have had many fruitful discussions with Christians attempting to draw applications about Biblical sacrifice to the modern-day believer's walk. A common thought put forward is that of us "sacrificing" certain things in our life, such as over-eating, smoking, watching too much television, or whatever a person believes their particular vice or vices to be. However, this is not at all the sense behind Scriptural sacrifice.

Sacrifices were offerings, and offerings were gifts to God, so would we really wish to gift to

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God all the things we don't think are acceptable to Him? There is a difference between removing things not helpful to ourselves or our walk and believing that such removal is some kind of "sacrifice" in a Biblical sense. Rather, if we wish to draw a parallel with the sacrificial offering system of the Bible, it is that our unwholesome habits should simply be

eliminated. This is usually easier said than done of course, but the principle remains true. Such eradication is somewhat akin to the ancient Levites washing themselves of anything causing them to be ceremonially unclean **before** carrying out the service of God (e.g. Numbers 8:5-8, 15). For us, this means dealing with things in our lives that are obstacles to us having closer fellowship with God. In the Law, if one felt the need to present a sacrificial offering because of some sin, then repentance of that sin needed to be genuine and, when applicable, a reparation payment made before any “sacrifice” in the Scriptural sense was made. (e.g. Leviticus 6:1-7).

You may be familiar with the phrase, “to obey is better than sacrifice”. In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul was given some instructions from God, which he failed to heed. Indeed, it involved the plundering of livestock from an enemy so that the animals could be used in sacrifices to God. However, sacrifice of animals belonging to the Amalekites was contrary to the word of God. The prophet Samuel confronted Saul about this, saying, “Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD?”, before stating the profound principle, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (v.9-22). Today, this edict of Samuel does not strictly apply to the modern-day Christian because Christ has fulfilled the types of the Levitical sacrificial system, and animal sacrifices are no longer required to cover our sin. Nevertheless, obedience to God’s Word is always the best option in our lives.

A Christian’s fundamental standing before God will not change when sin is committed because, “having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). However, our closeness of fellowship with Him could be hindered. Perhaps the Christian’s “law” regarding sacrifice and obedience could be summed up in the New Testament instructions: “Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”, and “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Ephesians 4:1, 30).

Sins - intentional and unintentional:

In one sense all sin is the same, in that it is an action or state falling short of God’s perfect standard - “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The biggest problem with our sin is that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The sacrificial system was provided so that the ancients could have their sins atoned, and thus live.

In another sense however, not all sin is the same. Our society considers murder to be a greater misdemeanour than telling a lie, for example, and the Mosaic Law also reflected this kind of difference. Murder was generally met with a punishment of death (e.g. Numbers 35:16-21), whereas lying could be atoned for by way of presenting a sacrifice (e.g. Leviticus 6:1-7). This was generally true, but it wasn’t always the case. The greater determining factor was actually the intent behind the action, and one’s attitude to God’s law in the process. Earlier, in Chapter 3, we considered some of the principles governing the offerings. One of these (No.5) was that there was no provision for intentional sin under the Mosaic Law. The question of what constituted intentional sin is discussed back in that section.

Theologically, it may be debated whether this principle carries across to today. Is someone who once may have embraced Christianity, but now strongly rejects the things of God, still covered by Christ's sacrifice? We will not discuss that question here (some of these issues are examined at length in Sylvia Penny's work "Salvation - Safe and Secure?", published by the Open Bible Trust), but suffice to say, how God will judge another person is, ultimately, beyond our jurisdiction. In the end, this is really God's decision to make, and not something that should be committed to the judgment of fallen man.

... A person's sin matters to God. It mattered in ancient times and it still does today ...

Nevertheless, the principle that there was no atoning sacrifice available for intentional sin highlights another important point; namely, that a person's sin matters to God. It mattered in ancient times and it still does today. Sin offends God, and the modern-day Christian

should not think that sin in our lives means nothing to God. Thankfully, our sin and sins have been dealt with via the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will not be held against us in terms of our salvation and reconciliation to God. Yet, again, we would do well to bear in mind those commands to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called", and to not "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" by our actions (Ephesians 4:1,30). We could also add the edict, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). It would seem, even for Christians who have been reconciled to God, that the intent of our hearts is important to Him. Regular defiance of God's instructions, especially by believers familiar with His word, is behaviour that is grieving to him.

Cost:

Offerings in ancient times were gifts to God which had to cost the offerer something (as discussed earlier in Chapter 3, point 6). In Chapter 16, we discussed the great cost Christ bore in securing our salvation:

You were bought at a **price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

You were bought at a **price**; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God ... (1 Corinthians 7:23)

Referring to that cost, each of the verses above subsequently go on to exhort the believer to behave in ways pleasing to God. The cost of Christ's sacrifice is not to be forgotten as we go about our daily lives. The giving of His life for ours should impact on our walk. Before we were saved, we were as dead men walking, "having no hope" (Ephesians 2:12), but we now have a hope of resurrected life because of what Christ outlaid to secure that hope. To say that we are "indebted" to Him might be one way to express this, although strictly speaking that is not consistent with the principles of the sacrificial system, because the sacrifices were not payments. Rather, it is better to say that a costly gift has been made on our behalf; therefore, this should be a constant reminder to us that our lives should be dedicated to the pleasing of

the Lord, and not ourselves, since without His sacrifice, we would not have been granted “life”.

Personal involvement and responsibility:

The Levitical priests stationed at the altar of the sanctuary assisted the offerer of sacrifices in expressing certain sentiments towards God. However, these official ministers were not responsible for the heart, actions or sentiments of the offerer. The priest merely facilitated the offering process; it was really the offerer’s own relationship to God being tended to when sacrifices were being presented. When the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law were first instituted at Mt. Sinai, the offerer was to be very involved in the process. Only priests were permitted to handle blood and place sacrifices on the altar, but the commoner’s participation was extensive, including placing his own hand on the head of the animal, killing the animal himself, skinning the animal, portioning it, and washing the portions (e.g. Leviticus 1:3-9).

The “hands on” participation of the ancient offerer can be likened somewhat to the modern-day Christian’s relationship with God, which exists at both an individual and a corporate level. Both facets require our personal involvement and interaction with others to be pleasing to God. Paul uses some sanctuary terminology in Ephesians whilst dealing this very issue:

the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ... Therefore ... walk ... with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 2:21, 22; 4:1-3)

At an individual level, a walk before God that is acceptable and pleasing to Him may be assisted and influenced by our Church officials and leaders, but it is not solely reliant upon them. There is a misguided conception amongst many church members that the pastor or minister knows everything, and that the most important things of the Christian faith take place at the Sunday service. Sometimes, we convince ourselves to have been active participants in our faith just because our church has scheduled a service, Bible study meeting, or other gathering ... and we turned up!

... A walk before God that is acceptable and pleasing to Him may be assisted and influenced by our Church officials and leaders, but it is not solely reliant upon them ...

In truth, developing our relationship with God involves more than mere attendance, singing the praises of God in a congregational setting, and listening to a sermon, even though these things have their place. Instead, each one of us should assess our own level of participation in our relationship with God by asking, “What is my personal role and ongoing responsibility?” This goes much further than volunteering to be on the church cleaning roster, playing in the worship music band, co-ordinating the youth programme, etc. All of these actions may help to facilitate personal growth and a vibrant church, but in themselves and of themselves, they are not a direct indicator of one’s spiritual maturity or relationship with God.

It is my strong belief that a healthy Christian walk is greatly enhanced by interaction with other mature Christians. Such is usually an environment conducive for positive Christian influence, but it is no guarantee. Certainly, a poor Christian environment or misleading teaching from the pulpit can lead us in the wrong direction. In Paul's day, Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that the future resurrection of believers had "already past", and this teaching had tragic consequences - "they overthrow the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:17, 18). Exactly how this tragedy played out we are not told, but it is safe to assume that the walk of such believers was misdirected and somewhat derailed because of the erroneous influence of those men. This is all the more reason why we ourselves, and not just our Church leaders, are responsible for "watching" and being alert (1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:5; etc.). It is also why we should look to the Scriptures as the final arbiter because, not only were they "given by inspiration of God", but they are also "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The word "instruction" in this verse may suggest to us a picture of a preacher in pulpit using the Bible to instruct the congregation. This is partly correct, but it is not restricted to leaders of our churches. Rather, Paul's exhortation is that the Scriptures may be taught and familiarised by all in order that each believer - clergy or layperson - may be "thoroughly equipped for every good work".

Ultimately, we are each personally responsible for nurturing our own relationship with God, and we are to be active participants. It is never purely someone else's responsibility. It is we, and not our church's leaders, who have the majority part to play in our walk before the Lord.

The priest and modern-day ministers:

Priests, Levitical or otherwise, were mediators between God and other people. They assisted the common people in the presentation of offerings (e.g. Leviticus 1:5-9, etc.), and were also to teach the people the Word of God: "they shall teach Jacob your judgements, and Israel your Law" (Deuteronomy 33:10; see also 24:8 and Leviticus 10:11; 14:57). As noted back in Chapter 16, those who are called "priests" in our society today bear little resemblance to the priests of Biblical times, because sacrificial offerings are not presented by them, and there is now only "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

The priests of Bible times were supposed to be servants, guiding and teaching the people, and in this way, there is a certain parallel with those in modern-day Christian ministry. For those believers in positions of leadership and teaching within our church communities today, the reward and personal satisfaction can be great, but so is the responsibility. This is true of those in full-time paid positions, or those serving in some other part-time or voluntary capacity. Being in a position of authority without an accompanying sense of duty often



merely feeds one's own ego and may end up achieving little else of real value.

It is a sad fact that there are too many who desire to be in positions of leadership within churches and Christian fellowships “understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm” (1 Timothy 1:7). Training, both formal and informal, plays an important role in preparing people for positions of Christian ministry. It is my belief that an education in Christian leadership, if Biblically based, is an important and helpful contributor to church life. However, it is notable that the Bible, the ultimate instruction manual, actually says nothing of church leaders undertaking such formal training via a Christian college, etc., but does set forth the following guidelines:

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons [i.e. servants] are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons ... A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. (1 Timothy 3:2-12 NIV)

May we who are involved in Christian ministry, or those of us contemplating a more active formal role in our churches, assess ourselves in light of these Scriptural directives, which were set down long before any courses or degrees in ministry were established. I emphasise again that such formal training can be of great benefit, but it is a divinely inspired instruction that the Bible should be our prime guide in this area (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Acceptance of the offering:

It is common for Christian believers to say that they have “accepted” Christ. What is usually meant is that the offer of salvation, because of Christ's sacrifice, has been taken up by the sinner. This saying of “accepting Christ” is not without justification (e.g. Acts 24:15 NKJV), but what is often less recognised is **the need for us to be acceptable** before God, both in our standing and in our daily actions.

Importantly, the believer in Christ can rest assured of being accepted by God because:

[Christ has] given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

As we have seen, the smell of the rising smoke from the sacrifices was an aroma pleasing to God (Leviticus 1:9), if performed correctly and with sincerity of heart. Christ's life and offering of Himself upon the cross was exactly that, as well. However, the verse above, quoted from Ephesians, has implications for the Christian's manner of life. Here is the fuller quote:

Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. 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. (Ephesians 5:1, 2)

Whilst these verses remind us that Christ's sacrifice was acceptable to God, the emphasis is really on Christian behaviour, and how that should also be carried out in a way acceptable to Him. The very next verses give us some indication of what is, and what is not, appropriate behaviour:

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks ... For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), **finding out what is acceptable to the Lord**. (Ephesians 5:3, 4, 8-10)

If we still don't know "what is acceptable to the Lord", then we can "find out" (Ephesians 5:10) by familiarising ourselves with the Scriptures – especially the New Testament epistles – which are full of exhortations and guidance for the Christian's walk. In addition to Ephesians 5 quoted above, note that each of the following verses from New Testament letters refers to godly actions being linked with the way that the Levitical sacrifices were presented and accepted:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living **sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and **acceptable** and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1, 2)

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. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such **sacrifices** God is well **pleased**. (Hebrews 13:15, 16)

I [Paul] am full, having received from Epaphroditus the [gifts] sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an **acceptable sacrifice**, well **pleasing** to God. (Philippians 4:18)

These "sacrifices" being offered are not like the purification or reparation offerings seeking God's forgiveness. Rather, they are more like the completion offerings, which were offered by people already in a right standing before God – atonement and forgiveness having already being attained – and hoping that these actions will be seen as acceptable and pleasing to Him.

Other actions said to be “acceptable” to God may be found in Romans 14:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 5:4; and Hebrews 12:28.

Mercy:

In Chapter 16, we discussed how sin is an obstacle to fellowship with God, that the “wages” of sin is death with all people being declared as sinners, and that God has been merciful in allowing the obstacle of a person’s sin to be covered (atoned), thus opening the way for reconciliation to Him and salvation from death. In the most ancient times, this atonement and reconciliation was via the offering of sacrifices. Since the cross, it has been via accepting the substitutionary offering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is merciful in providing allowance that a substitute might die in the sinner’s place. Simply put, each of God’s people has been shown great mercy by Him:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant **mercy** has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3; see also 2:10)

God, who is rich in **mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us (Ephesians 2:4)

As a consequence of this mercy having been shown, the Scriptures speak often of how important it is that we, in turn, should show mercy to others:

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving** one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and **mercy** and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (Matthew 23:23)

I desire **mercy** and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

If you had known what this means, ‘I desire **mercy** and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. (Matthew 12:7)

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of **mercy** and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (James 3:17)

Therefore ... put on tender **mercies** [NIV – clothe yourselves with compassion] (Colossians 3:12)

Other people wrong us all the time by way of a selfish act, an inconsiderate deed, an insulting word, an offensive action, an unfair treatment ... and the list goes on. The world is comprised of sinners and their sinful behaviour, and these things can sometimes cause us great pain. The bad news is that “**all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), ourselves included. The way we are sometimes offended by other people’s conduct can give us a glimpse into the way that God is likewise offended by the sin of you and me.



The good news is that He has been merciful towards us, and given us a precious gift, which none of us could even hope to approach in greatness. The offering system was grounded in mercy; let us therefore be slower to condemn and criticise others in our lives and, rather, extend mercy, forgiveness and compassion because, if for no other reason, abundant mercy has been extended to us.

Some applications for today, based on specific offerings

Purification and Reparation offerings:

The purification and reparation offerings were two varieties of offerings relating to sin and shortcomings, each with their own particular nuances. The purification offering covered all manner of shortcomings that needed to be addressed before one could properly approach God. The reparation offering applied when someone had caused injury or damage to another party - human or God - or their property; reparation, plus 20%, was made to the injured party by way of compensation, but an animal was still sacrificed to God in much the same manner as that of the purification offering. In other words, even though God was not always directly wronged or injured, that particular action still displeased God and placed a person out of the closest fellowship with Him until a sacrifice was able to atone for the action. Such is the abhorrence God had - and has - for sin.

These two offerings pose another reminder to us that God is not ignorant or dismissive of our selfish tendencies. Even though the Christian has peace with God through Christ, our sinful actions still offend God. In the midst of a passage about the do’s and don’ts of living as saved Christians, we are urged to “not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). Let us take care to understand this properly. We are saved by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8,9), so it is not as if every time we commit a misdemeanour, our salvation is in danger. Note again those words of Ephesians 4:30 just quoted. Christians have the assurance of having been **sealed** and secured, and still retain the hope of resurrection, but are warned not to behave in ways that **grieve** God.

Focussing on the reparation offering in particular, it draws our attention to the importance of treating our fellow human beings with respect and honesty. The so-called “Golden Rule” is “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. This famous statement is not actually a direct quote from the Bible, but a paraphrase of what is certainly a Biblical principle:

... Christians have the assurance of having been sealed and secured, but are warned not to behave in ways that grieve God ...

Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. (Luke 6:31)

It was not merely a “nice” suggestion for the Israelites of old to consider, it was actually the Law:

Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

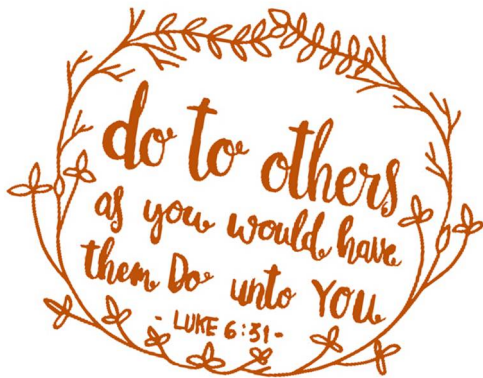
One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:35-40)

If you really fulfil the royal law according to Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”, you do well. (James 2:8 cp. Leviticus 19:18)

Hence, the reparation offering process, respecting the needs of other people, had a place in the Mosaic Law. The “love” spoken of in these verses is not really a feeling of affection, but *agape* love, a self-sacrificing love that puts others’ needs first. We each have to interact with people with whom we may not be the best of friends or sense a natural bond of affection; nevertheless we are exhorted to extend a hand of caring and self-giving. On a few occasions, I have met Christian folk who have had great respect for God, whilst harbouring a kind of disdain for other humans. Whilst the superiority of God over people is undeniable, such contempt for others runs contrary to the words of Scripture:

... in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3, 4)

The reparation offering acknowledged a person's wrongdoing against another being (God or human) and was an attempt to repay them for damage caused. Sometimes our own wrongdoing against others is accidental or careless, and sometimes we are not even aware of it until it is brought to our attention (e.g. Leviticus 4:13, 14; 5:17). However, it is never too late to admit that we may have offended or hurt someone, and it is never out of place for us to attempt to address that situation. Our "offering" may be accepted or rejected by them, but like God with the sacrifices of old, it is up to the party offended to either receive or repudiate our gesture of contrition, and we can't always be assured which of those reactions will be forthcoming.



When all is said and done, the Golden Rule - do unto others as you would have them do unto you - is a sound one. If we find ourselves in the position of having wronged someone, it behoves us to do our best to attend to the matter; not just so that they will allow us back into their good books, or that we might look virtuous, but so that their very real interests and concerns may be addressed.

Approach Offering:

The approach offering brings to mind God's greatness and holiness compared with ours. Although Christians have privileged access to Him, and have been reconciled to Him, we should never forget our place before Him. He is God, the superior being, the creator of everything ... and we are not! In our dealings with God, we should always be humble and respectful, putting Him first.

Because the approach offering was also about atonement, it is a reminder of our inherent sinful nature. Every person has it. This was a fact that even the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees of Christ's time could not deny about themselves:

The scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. ... He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." ... Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (John 8:3-9)

None of the woman's accusers could throw that first stone, because they all knew about their own inherent sin. This was a fact reinforced to them continually via the twice daily, morning

and evening, approach offerings (Exodus 29:38-42), and other purification rituals. It was part of their Law that each person was not without sin to some degree.

Thankfully, Christ's sacrifice has atoned for the sinful nature that still remains within us. However, it is no longer an obstacle to fellowship with God, because the Father looks upon the Son in whom He is well pleased, instead of looking upon us as we are. Nevertheless, it helps to be reminded of this fact because we are not inherently without sin; rather, we are **reckoned** to be without sin because of the grace that has been extended to us (Romans 4:22-25).

Tribute Offering:

The tribute offering was most often presented in tandem with the approach offering, and was an acknowledgement that God, through Christ, sustains life and makes it possible for mankind to exist. The Scriptures are very clear about this:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:3, 4)

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Colossians 1:16, 17)

We should never forget that God created everything, and we would have nothing – no clothes on our back, no food to eat, no environment suitable for habitation, not even very our lives – had He not enabled it in the first place. Therefore, we are repeatedly and justifiably exhorted to give thanks always:

In everything give **thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

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)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving **thanks** to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with **thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Is there any more that needs to be said about this? In whatever circumstance we find ourselves, we should be grateful to the God who has provided absolutely everything and has our very lives in His hands!

Completion Offerings:

Commonly referred to as “peace” or “fellowship” offerings in English translations, the various forms of the completion offerings were those offered by people in the closest of fellowship with God. Their sin and sins having been atoned for, and their tribute offering having been presented, these gifts to God were a subsequent expression of being in fellowship with Him. They took the form of voluntary and thanksgiving offerings, as well as those related to vows (Leviticus 7:12, 16).

Concerning the modern-day Christian, who is already atoned for, we are said to be “complete” in Christ (Colossians 2:10). The Greek word behind “complete” in this verse is *pleroó*, meaning to be made full. So thorough was the work of the Lord on the cross that, at least as far as our standing before God is concerned, there is nothing else to be done. In the sense of being at one with God, we can also find several aspects of the “peace” offerings in the following verses:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. **The Lord is at hand.** 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. (Philippians 4:4-7)

In this passage, the phrase “the Lord is at hand” is not speaking of Christ’s return. Rather it refers to the nearness of God to the believer, a reminder of what an ancient offerer’s approach offering sought to achieve by endeavouring to approach God and draw near to Him. Figuratively speaking, for the Christian, the approach offering has been presented and accepted, and nearness to the Lord has been attained. The completion offerings of prayer and thanksgiving may be made with the assurance of God’s care and protection staving off anything that might otherwise threaten that nearness.

One’s offerings of thankfulness and rejoicing will go a long way to gaining a sense of peace and certainty about this. Our hearts and minds shall be “guarded” (Philippians 4:7) in the sense that all doubts about God’s ability to care for us will be excluded when we consider every facet of our lives in light of God’s love and greatness. Anxiety and fear should be kept at bay in such circumstance, because we are not focussing on the things in our lives that may harm or distress us, but on the God from whom we cannot be separated - the One who has the ultimate say on our wellbeing. Even Paul, who



suffered great persecution, personal loss and physical harm (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) was able to say with utmost confidence, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice!”. Such is the total assuredness he had in the completed work of Christ, ensuring God’s hand over the believer’s life and future hope. Elsewhere, Paul exclaims:

Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38, 39)

No one in this world or any other sphere has enough money, influence or force to take us away from God and the love He has poured out on us. Nothing can separate us from Him ... Nothing!

* * *

Concluding Remarks

It is hoped that this often-complex subject of offerings and sacrifices may be seen to have great relevance to the Christian today. Not only does a study of these things shed light on some of the fundamentals (and nuances) of our faith, but its lessons can help to guide us in our daily walk before the Lord. I do hope that this is your experience. May our contemplation of these issues, and a better walk because of it, bring glory to the Lord who is the Creator and the provider of the means of our salvation.

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Appendix 1:

A Guide for Bible Readings Concerning Offerings

In this book, we have been introduced to the principles governing the offerings, the different types of offering, the different classes of offering and the fact that some offerings were mandatory or voluntary depending on circumstance. There are many complexities, and many other facets we might take into account, but the basic theoretical aspects of the offering process have now been covered.

Having some understanding about these things should affect our study of Scripture. Here are some suggestions of how to get more out of a Bible passage when encountering terms related to sacrificial offerings in the Bible.

(1) Recognise the difficulty in studying the subject:

It doesn't take long to discover that there are many complexities involved in trying to unravel the offering process. There are some aspects we will never get to the bottom of, but there are certainly some that we can. An acknowledgement that we are unlikely to have a complete knowledge of this subject may sound defeatist to some readers, but there are many things working against us (see Chapter 15 for some of the obstacles). God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), therefore, exercise diligence with patience, pray for understanding and be thankful for any light the Lord sees fit to shine upon His Word as you read about these things.

(2) Note the frequency of the subject in the Bible:

There is barely a page in the Bible after Exodus 19 - Old or New Testament - that doesn't mention or imply the offering process or some aspect closely associated with it. If this seems too bold a statement, consider the approximate number of times the following words occur after the giving of the Law at Sinai (exact numbers will vary between one Bible version and another, but the figures are about the same):

- “sacrifice” - about 300 occurrences
- “offer”, “offering”, etc. - well over 800 occurrences
- “altar” - over 350 occurrences
- “priest”, “priesthood”, etc. - almost 850 occurrences
- “sanctuary”, “temple”, “tabernacle”, “courts”, etc. - well over 900 occurrences

Words like “offer”, “offering” and “sacrifice” are fairly obvious to spot, but terms such as “altar”, “priest”, “priesthood”, and other phrases related to the sanctuary should also be noted. By far the most common activity in the sanctuary was the offering of sacrifices upon the altar, and the priesthood's main function was to assist in the offerings. Certainly, supplementary events took place in the sanctuary and the priests had several other roles to carry out, but the offering process was easily the most common undertaking. The sanctuary,

the priesthood and the offerings are all so closely linked with each other, that they really shouldn't be thought of separately.

A number of times, in the Old Testament especially, we read of someone building an altar; for example: Noah in Genesis 8:20, Abraham in Genesis 12:7, Samuel in 1 Samuel 7:17, etc. There is no mention of sacrifices in any of those particular verses, but an altar was not a mere memorial site. It was a place where an offering took place, most commonly involving the sacrifice of an animal. It is often easy to read a sentence like "he built an altar there" and keep reading without giving it a second thought; however, such a phrase should now make us stop and think. Altars were built for the purpose of making offerings, so why did that person present an offering? What kind of offering was it? What was hoped would be achieved?

In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, we read of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was a cultural hub where many different goings-on took place, but this was the designated place for Israelites to present their offerings. Much sacrificial slaughtering took place daily within its courts. The incident of Mary presenting the baby Jesus at the temple (Luke 2:22-24) and the incident of the Lord as an adult overturning the seats of those who sold doves (Matthew 21:12) are passages we may readily read over without thinking of the sacrificial animals, but the centuries-old Levitical system of offerings provides the context for each of these events.

Most of the occurrences are literal, but in the New Testament especially, there are many figurative uses of such terms; e.g., Hebrews 13:15 ("let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God") and Romans 12:1 ("present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God"). Such phrases should remind us of some of the nuances behind the offering processes. We will discover many more examples like these in both the Old and New Testaments if we read the texts with care.

(3) Determine who are the people involved:

As noted in Chapter 12, offerings were made **by** different people, **on behalf of** different people. When we come across a passage including an offering being made, note whether it is a national offering (made on behalf of the nation of Israel); an official offering (made on behalf of an Aaronic priest, the Aaronic priesthood as a whole, or a king/ruler, etc.), a tribal offering (made on behalf of one of the 12 tribes of Israel), or a personal offering (made on behalf of an individual and/or their family).

(4) Note which particular offering is being made:

Most Bible readers can easily distinguish monetary offerings from the sacrificial ones involving animals. What is not so often distinguished is the difference between one of the five main offerings and another. We will learn so much more from a passage if we take the time to observe exactly what kind of offering is being spoken of. This is generally much clearer in the Old Testament than in the New. Ask yourself questions like: "What kind of offering is being described in this passage?" As shown in Chapters 5 to 9, there is quite a difference between, for example, a "peace" offering and a "sin" offering.

(5) Try to determine for what purpose, and under what circumstances, an offering is being made:

Settling this issue will often show us something about a person's (or Israel's) relationship with God at the time. Was the offering required, or was it a voluntary act? Is more than one sacrifice being carried out at the same time? If so, think about why this would be the case. Bringing together some of these and the previous thought, it will almost always give us a greater appreciation of a passage if we can establish why someone is offering a sacrifice in that text.

(6) Consider Christ's fulfilment and applications for the Christian in light of the pre-established truths:

Having contemplated some guidelines for approaching Bible passages involving the offering process, we should now be in a sounder position to understand Christ's fulfilment of the offerings, and consider some of lessons about offerings concerning our own standing and walk before God. Ask yourself questions like: What was being achieved in the act of offering? What did the various procedures first mean to those who carried them out? The applications that the Christian may conclude are many, but we will make better and more well-founded applications when we consider what the implications were to the ancients who first experienced them.

(7) Put the lessons into practice:

May the truths associated with the Biblical offerings find themselves exercised in our daily walk before the Lord. When Christ was consulted as to which was the great commandment in the law. He replied: "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40). As a significant part of the Law, the offerings reflected what should have been love for both God and one's fellow humans. The "love" was *agape* love, not a feel-good, emotive kind of love, but that which is a real giving of oneself in respect to others. Any applications flowing from our study of the Biblical offerings should result, not only in us becoming more informed about the subject, but, more importantly, in our putting this kind of love into effect in our own lives.

* * *

Following these suggestions, especially when coming across references to sacrificial offering, should greatly enhance your understanding and appreciation of the Bible passage at hand. May these guidelines aid your reading of God's Word, and bring glory to the Lord in the process.

Appendix 2: Atonement - some additional comments

Atonement is a subject very closely associated with offerings and sacrifices. People offered sacrifices either because they were seeking atonement, or because atonement had already been made. So, we really need to be quite familiar with the concepts surrounding atonement if we are to better understand the offering system. In this appendix we will consider what atonement is, and what it is not. We shall also examine atonement in several differing contexts, in order to gain an overall sense for this important concept, especially in relation to the offerings and sacrifices.

What is atonement?

Let us commence with a brief definition. Simply put, atonement is the covering of sin so that God's wrath is averted. Atonement nullifies the barrier that sin would normally place between God and a person. When atonement is made, the obstacle hindering a person's fellowship with God is removed and they are reconciled to Him. This applies both to those ancients who offered sacrifices and people today whose faith is in Christ.

Sin would normally spell death for a person, but when atonement takes place, God allows a substitutionary action to cover the repulsiveness of sin, and He is appeased or satisfied that enough has been done to allow a person to live. In this sense, it may also be said that atonement is a form of appeasement or propitiation. It is the covering of sin to the point where a person's sin is no longer a hindrance to God accepting that person. Once atonement has been made, the way for reconciliation and closer fellowship with God is then opened.

Brief examples of sacrificial offerings for atonement

Atonement is found throughout the Bible in different settings. Specifically, in terms of animal sacrifices, there are a few notable examples. In Leviticus 1:3,4, we read some instructions for making a certain type of offering:

If his offering is a **burnt sacrifice** [or "approach offering"] of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish ... it will be accepted on his behalf to make **atonement** for him. (Leviticus 1:3, 4)

Elsewhere we read of a different type of offering:

If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything ... he shall ... kill the **sin offering** [or "purification offering"] ... So the priest shall make **atonement** for him, and it shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 4:27-31)

And another type of offering:

If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD ... he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock [the “reparation offering”] ... So the priest shall make **atonement** for him regarding his ignorance in which he erred and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 5:17, 18)

There is even an entire festival day devoted to the issue:

The tenth day of this seventh month shall be the **Day of Atonement** ... you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. (Leviticus 23:27)

Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house ... **On that day the priest shall make atonement** for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. (Leviticus 16:6, 30)

It should be noted that atonement is mentioned about 50 times in Leviticus alone. The seeking of atonement was not the only reason a person would sacrifice an animal, as seen in Chapters 5 to 9. Nevertheless, it is a very important word when it comes to understanding the sacrificial offerings.

Definitions of the relevant Hebrew and Greek words

Many modern dictionaries, both Christian and secular, define atonement along the lines of making amends, or “reconciliation”. Although atonement and reconciliation are closely aligned, they are not the same thing. Atonement must be made first before reconciliation can occur. We will explore this idea a little later in this article.

The best way to determine the meaning of atonement, as used in the Bible, is to note the meanings and usage of the original Hebrew and Greek words. By doing this, we will see that four ideas stand out - **covering, appeasement, mercy and the aversion of wrath**. Let us now look at the relevant words in the original Biblical languages (the accompanying numeral is a Strong’s reference number):

Hebrew (Old Testament)

Each of the relevant Hebrew words are constructed around a three-letter stem, “*k-p-r*”, meaning “to cover”.

3722 *kaphar* (verb) - to make atonement.
(e.g. “the priest shall make **atonement** for them” - Leviticus 4:20.)

3725 *kippurim* (noun, usually in plural form) atonement.
(e.g. “the day of **atonement**” - Leviticus 23:27)

3724 *kopher* (noun) Depending on the context, this may mean, not only atonement itself, but also things like ransom or appeasement money and even tar.
 (e.g. “nor give to God a **ransom** for him” - Psalm 49:7)
 (e.g. “make yourself an ark ... and cover it inside and outside with **pitch**” - Genesis 6:14)

3727 *kapporeth* (noun) mercy seat, the place of atonement, i.e. the covering lid on the ark of the covenant. Literally meaning “the place of atonement”, this word is usually translated in our English Bibles as “the mercy seat”, i.e. the covering lid of the ark in the sanctuary.
 (e.g. “you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold” - Exodus 25:17)

Greek (New Testament & Septuagint)

Each of the relevant Greek words are built around the stem *hilas-*. These occur in both the Greek of the New Testament, and also the Greek of the Septuagint, which is an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint can shed light on meanings behind Greek words in the New Testament.

2433 *hilaskomai* (verb) to make atonement, be merciful
 (e.g. “God be **merciful** to me a sinner” - Luke 18:13)

2434 *hilasmos* (noun) atonement
 (e.g. “sent His Son as an **atonement sacrifice** for our sins” - 1 John 4:10 NIV)

2435 *hilasterion* (noun) mercy seat, the place of atonement, i.e. the covering lid on the ark of the covenant
 (e.g. “above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the **mercy seat**” - Hebrews 9:5)

2436 *hileos* (adjective) merciful
 (e.g. “I will be **merciful** to their unrighteousness” - Hebrews 8:12)

Some additional Greek words occur in the Septuagint only. These are related to the *hilas-* words listed above, and are based on the stem *exhilas* (a derivative of *ek-hilas*):

exilaomai, exilaskomai (verbs) appease, propitiate, make atonement
 (e.g.; “to make **atonement** for him” - Leviticus 1:4; “I will **appease** him” - Genesis 32:20)

exilasis (noun) atonement
 (e.g. “the sin offering for **atonement**” - Numbers 29:11)

exilasma (noun) appeasement money, bribe
 (e.g. “from whose hand have I received any **bribe**” - 1 Samuel 12:3)

exilasmós (noun) atonement
(e.g. “the Day of **Atonement**” - Leviticus 23:27)

Both the Hebrew *k-p-r* words and Greek *hilas-* words are linked to the ideas of covering, appeasement, mercy and the aversion of wrath. The word “propitiation” meaning the winning or regaining of someone’s favour, comes into the mix here. Indeed, where the NIV refers to Christ as the “atoning sacrifice for our sins”, the KJV and NKJV speak of Him as the “propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2, 4:10).

Broadly speaking, atonement is the covering of sin, and there is also the idea that the sin is covered to the point where God is appeased or satisfied and that the offending sin is no longer an obstacle to fellowship with Him. Once satisfied that the offence will cause no further hindrance, God is merciful to those who were once an offence to Him, and His wrath is averted.

Examples of atonement in Scripture (outside of an offerings context)

There are quite a few Biblical incidents that demonstrate the principle of atonement, and how it encompasses ideas of covering, appeasement and mercy. The passages we are about to look at should help us to understand more about what atonement is, and how this pertains to mankind’s relationship with God. Consider the following as examples of atonement:

(a) Moses’ plea for the people

An exchange between Moses and the Lord takes place on Mt. Sinai, just after the Israelites had formed a golden calf and begun to worship it as their god:

The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them ...” Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said ... “Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ” So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. (Exodus 32:9-14)

Note the people’s offence, the Lord’s wrath directed towards them as a result, the threat of a punishment of death, and then the plea of a faithful man on their behalf, which averted God’s wrath. The Septuagint version of that final verse (v.14) literally says that “the LORD was propitiated to preserve His people.” The Greek word for “propitiated” is *hilaskomai* (see 2433 above) and is a word closely aligned with atonement. Effectively, Moses was seeking atonement for the sins of people. His actions appeased (or satisfied) God, who showed mercy and averted His wrath. Thus, atonement was made.

(b) Israel and the plague

In the following passage, we twice read the very word atonement, and how it was made for a condemned people. The setting is the wilderness exodus journey again, and the people were rebelling against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron:

On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron ... And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." ... So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make **atonement** for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun." Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made **atonement** for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. (Numbers 16:41-50)

Upon first reading, this story might seem like it is filled with a lot of pagan superstition. Are we to believe that this was some kind of magic spell? How could incense stop a plague? The answer lies in the fact that the burning of incense upon the altar inside the tabernacle was a God-approved form of intercession by the priesthood on behalf of the nation of Israel (Exodus 30:1-10; cp. Revelation 5:8; 8:3, 4). In this incident, Aaron, the approved priest of God, was effectively pleading on behalf of the people. Twice we read that the burning of incense was an atoning action: "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them ... So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people ... so the plague was stopped."

The people had offended God, His wrath was directed towards them as a result, and the people began to die. However, we are specifically told that **atonement** was then made via the burning of incense, God's wrath was averted, the plague was halted, and the people were preserved.

(c) Jacob and Esau

An excellent example of the multi-faceted concept of atonement may also be seen in the lives of Jacob and Esau. The story takes place over a few chapters and begins with their blind father Isaac blessing his sons concerning their inheritance. Jacob offended Esau by fraudulently being granted the birthright instead of Esau (Genesis 27:18,19,27-29). This incurred the wrath of Esau, who said in his heart, "... I will kill my brother Jacob" (27:41). Understandably, this animosity brought about an alienation between the two brothers (27:42-45).

Some years later, when their paths crossed, Jacob was "greatly afraid and distressed" that Esau would kill him. (32:6-8). So, Jacob sought to avert the wrath of Esau by appeasing him with the offering of a gift, "that I may find favour in your sight" (32:3-5). In effect, Jacob was seeking atonement, but it was no certainty that Esau would accept this gesture:

“I will **appease** (Hebrew: *kaphar*, i.e. **atone**) him with the present that goes before me, ... perhaps he will accept me.” (Genesis 32:20).

Jacob humbled himself before the one he sought to appease. He “bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother” (33:3), after which, “Esau ran to meet him and embraced him” (33:4). Jacob’s gestures had been accepted, and Esau saw fit to open the way to reconciliation (33:4,8-11).

In brief, Jacob had caused offence to Esau, the one offended. Later on, Jacob humbled himself before Esau, sought to appease him, and hoped to avoid his wrath. Esau was satisfied with Jacob’s gesture and, thus, we can say that atonement was sought and made.

(d) David avenging the Gibeonites

Our final example of atonement involves a rather complex incident that took place in the days of King David. The Lord had brought a famine upon the land because of an act performed by David’s predecessor, King Saul:

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, “It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites.” ... Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make **atonement**, that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?”. (2 Samuel 21:1-3)

What follows is that David took a number of actions, with the result that the Gibeonites were appeased. The Lord was satisfied that justice had been done, and “after that, God heeded the prayer for the land” (v.13). In a word, atonement for Saul’s sinful deed was sought and obtained.

Atonement is the condition where there is no longer any obstacle hindering fellowship between two parties, and it is prominent in the Bible, as we have seen in the examples above. This idea is quite pronounced in some of the sacrificial offerings and quite essential to the Christian’s standing with God; each of these aspects is discussed in the main text of this book.

The seeking of atonement in a sacrificial context

Three of the five main sacrificial offerings sought atonement. One of these was the approach offering, related to one’s inherent sin (Leviticus 1:4). The other two were the purification offering and the reparation offering, which both related to individual sins, misdemeanours, acts of impurity, etc. (Leviticus 4:26; 5:16). See Chapters 4 to 9 of this book for more details about these offerings. In brief, an animal was sacrificed in the place of a person (or the nation). If the regulations specific to an offering were carried out correctly and with sincerity

of heart, atonement was made. In other words, God accepted this gesture and the sin was no longer an obstacle to closer fellowship with Him.

In addition to these particular offerings was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus chapter 16, and 23:26-32). Today this is often referred to by its Hebrew name, Yom Kippur. The word *yom* means “day”, and *kippur* is the word translated as “atonement”, as listed earlier in this article (Strong’s no. 3725). This very solemn occasion was instituted back in Leviticus, alongside several other festivals such as the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles. Rather than being a joyous celebration, it was a day of mourning and reflection upon sins committed during the past 12 months. The Bible states the reason for its observation: “to make atonement for you before the LORD” (Leviticus 23:28). It was a solemn reminder of Israel’s impurity, sinful state, and sins committed, even during the “best” and most uprightly religious of times. Particular laws about the Day of Atonement are set out in Leviticus chapters 16 and 23.

Atonement in a Christian context

The New Testament writers show us that Christ’s death on the cross was a sacrifice that, among other things, sought and obtained atonement:

God... loved us and sent His son as an **atoning sacrifice** for our sins (1 John 4:10 NIV)

Jesus Christ, the Righteous One ... is the **atoning sacrifice** for our sins (1 John 2:1, 2 NIV)

For this reason [Christ] had to be made [like His brothers] ... that He might make **atonement** for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17 NIV)

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of **atonement**, through the shedding of His blood (Romans 3:25 NIV)

Just as with the sacrifices of old, God accepted this superior sacrificial offering. For those who have faith in Christ, sin is no longer a stumbling block to closer fellowship with God. The obstacle of our sin has been covered, our God is appeased or satisfied and, through His mercy, His wrath towards us has been averted.

What atonement is not

Having established what atonement is, in both a sacrificial and Christian context, let us now consolidate our understanding by considering what atonement is not.

(a) Atonement does not mean that sins are not committed.

We are born with a sinful nature, we commit sins, and before we are resurrected with an immortal body, nothing can change that (1 Corinthians 15:53, 54). We constantly carry with us the sinful nature, and the individual sins that flow from this nature are an obstacle to us being right and acceptable before God:

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus **death spread to all men** (Romans 5:12)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

The wages of **sin** is **death** (Romans 6:23)

(b) Atonement does not mean that our lives are devoid of sin.

God's provision for making atonement doesn't pretend that a person's sin doesn't exist. In fact, the provisions about atonement within the Mosaic Law actually made people aware of sin's existence in their lives:

By the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. (Romans 7:7)

(c) Atonement does not simply mean to make amends for sin.

Sin, of itself, is not a mistake that can be corrected. We can be sorry for mistakes made. We may even be able to take steps to compensate an offended party. However, these compensatory steps, when offered to God, are not enough on their own to remove the obstacle of the sin having been committed. When Moses and Aaron atoned for the people during a plague (Numbers 16:41-50), there is no record of the people hoping to make up with God in some way, nor is there even any statement of remorse from them. It was the two leaders, on behalf of the people, who sought and obtained atonement via an approach that appeased God. The idea of making amends wasn't part of the equation, yet atonement was made.

(d) Atonement does not mean payment for sin.

In light of the previous point, it becomes apparent that neither does atonement mean payment for sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), so the only way that sin can be paid for appropriately is by the death of the sinner. When a substitute is offered sincerely on behalf of a person's life, either in the form of an animal or the Lord Jesus Christ, God is merciful and

accepts this. Christ's death atoned for our sin and sins, covering them sufficiently so as to avert God's wrath towards us in the form of death, as we would have deserved. This is not payment, this is mercy. Note well the language Scripture uses to describe this:

God, who is rich in **mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ... (Ephesians 2:4, 5)

This is a point worth exploring in more detail, as we shall now do.

We often hear and sing phrases proclaiming that Christ has "paid the debt", "paid the price", "paid the cost", "paid the penalty", etc. of our sins. None of these phrases actually occur in Scripture, and that is because a payment for our sins is not really what took place on the cross. Use a concordance or word search feature to look up the Biblical occurrences of such terms as pay, payment, paid, debt, penalty, cost, etc., and you will find that nowhere does Scripture say that Christ "paid the penalty for our sin", "cancelled our debt", or any such similar phrase. Rather, He **atoned** for our sin. The idea of Christ's sacrifice "paying the price I should have paid" would actually be quite foreign to the principles behind the sacrificial system, and not what atonement is about.

Consider again the actions of Moses and Aaron in halting the plague (Numbers 16:41-50). It was the intercession of two faithful men who sought and obtained atonement. In that instance, no animals were sacrificed; nothing that could be construed as a payment was given, yet we are told plainly that atonement was made.

Let me make it clear that Christ's work on the cross was totally sufficient for the believer to be reconciled to God. We have been reckoned as righteous (Philippians 3:9), and we have been sanctified or made "holy" (Ephesians 1:4); Christ's work was complete, and the believer is complete in Him as a result (Colossians 2:10); we have been saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8, 9). There is no more to be done on this front, so it is understandable that we should often use such language portraying an idea of full payment and cancellation of debt, because the work of Christ was so complete.

However, teaching that God's gift is a payment does not quite align with what is confirmed and reinforced by the Scriptures time and time again concerning atonement. If the reader is initially alarmed at this statement, it is not surprising, because the traditional thinking about Christ's sacrifice being a payment is rather ingrained in Christian theology. Certainly, Christ's sacrifice came at great "cost", and believers have been "bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23); indeed, we have become God's "purchased possession" (Ephesians 1:14), and this aspect of cost is discussed further in Chapter 16 where Christ's fulfilment of the offerings is considered. Despite being bought at a price, note that His death did not "pay the price" of our sin. Rather, His death atoned for our sin, covering it sufficiently so as to avert God's wrath:

God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us. (1 Thessalonians 5:9,10)

[We] were by nature children of wrath ... but God who is rich in mercy ... made us alive ... (Ephesians 2:3-5)

The end result is more or less the same: our sin and sins will not be held against us regarding our basic standing before God, and both the buying back and the atonement cost Christ His life, so the two ideas are not too far apart. Nevertheless, they are not exactly the same, either. We are redeemed by Christ's blood, and the idea of redemption often involves a price being paid, but redemption does not mean "to pay the penalty for sin". Redemption means "to bring back". So, what have we been brought back from and to? Essentially, we have been brought back from death to life; brought back from alienation from God, and we are now God's possession (Ephesians 1:14) not death's possession (or the possession of "Hades", 1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Death is the penalty or "wages" of sin (Romans 6:23) as a result of God's wrath, but through the atoning work of Christ, God's wrath towards us has been averted and will forever be so.

(e) Ransom money, or atonement money did not pay for a person's life.

When it came time for a census to be taken among the Israelites, atonement money was to be collected. Note that two of the Hebrew *k-p-r* words occur in the following passage:

When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a **ransom** [Hebrew: *kopher*] for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel ... Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LORD. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to the LORD, to make **atonement** for yourselves. And you shall take the **atonement** money [literally "money to make an atonement"; Hebrew: *kaphar*] of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle ... (Exodus 30:12-16)

This atonement money is often thought to be a kind of payment for a person's life. However, the question should be asked, "Is a human life worth only half a shekel?". Obviously, a life is far more valuable, and when seen in the light of *kaphar* and *kopher* relating to appeasement, it is clear that this was not so much a payment equal to the value of a life, but a token monetary gesture offered so as to avert punishment. Note also that this gesture was not applied to all of the population, but only to a fraction of the people, i.e. men of fighting age (v.14, cp. Numbers 1:2, 3).

In the book of Numbers, we see this money spoken of from a different angle:

You shall take no **ransom** [Hebrew: *kopher*] for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. (Numbers 35:31)

Where the NKJV and NIV read "ransom" in this verse, the KJV has "satisfaction":

Ye shall take no **satisfaction** for the life of a murderer who is guilty ...

In English, the words ransom and satisfaction bear little similarity, but in light of our studies, we should be able to see the connection between the two. The idea is that, in this instance, atonement money would not be sufficient to avert the wrath of God, and the person who deliberately killed another person would have to bear the guilt of their crime by paying with their life. A murderer could not pay for another person's life with money – his own life had to be taken in order to **satisfy** God's requirements in such cases. All of this further highlights that atonement and atonement money were not payments for sin or sinful acts.

(f) The Biblical concept of atonement is not exactly reconciliation or "at-one-ment".

In 1600's English, the word atonement was used to mean reconciliation, a resolution of differences between two parties. There are numerous examples of such usage in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries (see Charles Welch's article on "Atonement" in *An Alphabetical Analysis* Vol. 6). Hence the King James Version of the Bible, first published in 1611, translates the Greek word *katallage* in Romans 5:11 as "we have received the **atonement**", whereas a more accurate translation of this verse today would be "we have received the **reconciliation**". Because of that KJV translation, it is sometimes taught that atonement means "at-one-ment", or a state of two parties being "at one" with each other; i.e. reconciliation. Most, but not all, dictionaries of English agree. For example:

"The meaning of the word is simply at-one-ment, i.e., the state of being at one or being reconciled, so that atonement is reconciliation."

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

"The action of making amends for a wrong or injury."

Oxford Living Dictionaries

"Atonement is reconciliation."

Web Bible Encyclopedia (christiananswers.net)

Despite these modern-day definitions, the Biblical idea of reconciliation, though related to the ideas of covering and appeasement, really comes *after* atonement. The offending obstacle must first be covered, and the offended party must be appeased or satisfied. That is atonement in the Biblical sense. Only once this has occurred can reconciliation, or the state where two parties are "at-one" with each other, then take place. The ideas are related, but they are also quite distinct from one other. Observing this difference will assist us in understanding the offerings and sacrifices, as well as our relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Atonement in summary

Atonement is the state whereby there is no longer any obstacle hindering fellowship between two parties. Most often, the offender is man or mankind, and the party offended is God. The principle ideas of atonement – **covering, appeasement, mercy and the aversion of wrath** – are seen throughout Scripture, both within and outside of the sacrificial process. As far as the modern-day Christian is concerned, the atonement that has been made on our behalf is a great gift provided by Jesus Christ. Once, we were objects of wrath, deserving of death, but we have now been made alive! No wonder Paul says, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15), because words are not adequate to describe this gift’s all-encompassing nature, and the depth of mercy behind it.

Bibliography, Recommended Reading and Listening

The following resources are among those consulted in the process of researching the material covered by this book. The author does not necessarily agree with all the content within the following works, but has found them to be helpful reference tools.

Alfred Cave, B.A. - “The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice”. (This book from the late 1800’s is a detailed attempt to explore the phenomena of sacrificial offerings in Scripture, considering both practical and symbolic aspects.)

Alfred Cave, B.A. - “The Levitical Sacrifices Literally Considered” (Article located in the Introduction to the hard copy edition of *The Pulpit Commentary*” Vol. 2 - *Leviticus and Numbers*. Intended as a 30-page summary of his longer and more detailed book listed above.)

Alfred Edersheim - “The Temple - Its Ministry and Services” (This book focusses on the building structures as well as the related ceremonies and practices associated primarily with the temple of New Testament times. Since its publication in 1874, this has become a standard reference text on its subject.)

Rev. John Lightfoot - “The Temple Service” and “The Prospect of the Temple” (From *The Whole Works of Rev. John Lightfoot Vol. 9*. A similar approach to the Edersheim work listed above, but written much earlier in the mid 1600’s.)

Bob Deffinbaugh - “Leviticus: Sacrifice and Sanctification” (Chapter by chapter online commentary on Leviticus, retrieved from Bible.org. Easy-to-read and conversational in parts, this introductory level series is, nevertheless, still fairly substantial.)

Gordon J. Wenham - “The Book of Leviticus” (Commentary from *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* series, 1979. One of the more well researched and respected commentaries on Leviticus.)

Temple Institute Website (www.templeinstitute.org. Website dedicated to the study of all things related to the Jerusalem temple, past, present and future. Includes many helpful diagrams and explanations of temple practices.)

Tom Bradford - Torah Class Old Testament Studies (Verse by verse audio commentary messages, especially those on “Exodus”, “Leviticus” and “Numbers”).

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May our God be glorified by our study of this glorious and mysterious subject.