

# Offerings

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As we enter the Fall Holyday season, one of the subjects we encounter in our study of these days is the topic of the offerings. The offerings and sacrificial system is probably second only to the genealogies as something we skip over. As a result, there is much, even in the New Testament, that is misunderstood.

Today I want to take an overview of a small portion of the sacrificial system, specifically the animal sacrifices, and see what things we can learn from them.

Perhaps the biggest misconception about animal sacrifices is that they were instituted because of, or as a reminder for, sin. In fact, many assume this is all there was to it. But when you study the sacrificial system, you discover this is not the case. This is not to say that offerings for sin were not a part of the sacrificial system. The fact is though, that they were a relatively minor part of the sacrificial system.

To understand some of what I am talking about today, you need to first get a brief overview of the design of the tabernacle/temple. Both structures had a square room (the Most Holy place), which housed the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat, and an adjoining larger room (called the holy place), with the table of showbread, the golden lampstand and the golden altar of incense. Outside the tabernacle, in what was called the courtyard was the altar of burnt offering, and the laver.

The details and differences between the offerings are given in the first few chapters of Leviticus. It is not something most of us read unless we really want to study the offerings. I'm not going to read them now, but I will summarize them. Chapter 1 deals with the burnt offering. It was killed and skinned (the priest got to keep the skin) and washed, and then the entire animal was placed on the altar of burnt offering and it was entirely burned up. This was considered to be a sweet-savor offering, in praise and thanksgiving to God. Chapter 2 deals with the grain offering. It was also a sweet-savor offering, but I'm not going into that today. Chapter 3 is the peace offering, which we will discuss later. It was also a "sweet-savor" offering. And finally in Chapter 4 we get to the sin offering. The sin offering was the atoning offering. It was not a sweet savor. It is the one we focus on for the Day of Atonement. But it was actually the least common of the offerings, as we shall see.

But weren't all sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins? Not at all. Look at these NT scriptures:

(Rom 12:1-2 NKJV) 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. (2) 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.

(Eph 5:1-2 NKJV) Therefore be followers of God as dear children. (2) 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.

(Phil 4:16-18 NKJV) For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. (17) Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. (18) Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *which were sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

As you can see by these verses, we are to be a type of offering to God. But only Jesus Christ pictured a sin offering. Go to Hebrews 9:

(6) Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing *the services*. (7) But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people's sins *committed* in ignorance; (8) the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. (9) It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience; (10) *concerned* only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. (11) But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. (12) 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. (13) For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, (14) how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (15) And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

The rest of chapter 9 and 10 go further into the symbolism of Jesus as fulfilling the symbolism of the sin offering of the Day of Atonement.

The burnt offering and sin offering are often confused, yet they are very distinct in their meaning and practice. The burnt offering was a "sweet savor", something pleasing to God. The flesh was burned on the altar of burnt offering (the brass altar in front of the temple). No portion was ever eaten. The blood was never brought into the sanctuary, or holy place. It was not used to symbolize forgiveness of sins. Instead it was a type of thanksgiving offering, picturing our total submission to the will of God.

Numbers 28 and 29 list all of the offerings that were to be given on a regular basis. The animal sacrifices listed here consist of burnt offerings and sin offerings. It starts out by describing the daily offering. Note in verse 3 that this is a burnt offering, not a sin offering. Similarly, the Sabbath offerings were burnt offerings (v10). It is not until you get to the offerings for the new moons that you find a sin offering mentioned (v15).

If you count up all the animal sacrifices mentioned, and use an average 360 day year, you come up with approximately 1260 animals. 1260 is a curious number, of course, showing up many times in scripture. I can't say if this is only coincidence. I can however point out that of these 1260 animals, only 30 are sin offerings. They are confined to new moons and festivals. There was only one per day, except for the Day of Atonement, while there were many more burnt offerings. If there was a sin offering, it was offered first, and it was never the only offering. There were always burnt offerings which followed. While there were certainly sin offerings that individuals might bring, the prescribed sin offerings were less than 3 percent of what is listed here.

I would like to suggest that the symbolism in the frequency of these offerings can be instructive for us. We are not called to go through our lives undergoing constant self-flagellation. We should certainly repent of our sins when they occur, but our lives are primarily to be focused outward, more positive than negative. Ideally our prayers to God should focus on praise and thanksgiving. Read the New Testament especially and note how the instruction is primarily on how we are to act and live our lives, not on constantly repenting and feeling sorry for our inadequacies. We are to be daily sacrifices, and hopefully not need a daily offering for our sins. I would like to suggest if we sin that often, perhaps we are not making the progress we should.

(Heb 13:10-12 NKJV) "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. (11) For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. (12) Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate."

The author of Hebrews is making a reference here to a peculiar aspect of the sin offering.

(Lev 4:1-12 NKJV) "Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (2) "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which ought not to be done, and does any of them, (3) 'if the **anointed priest** sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering. (4) 'He shall bring the bull to the **door of the tabernacle of meeting** before the LORD, lay his hand on the bull's head, and kill the bull before the LORD. (5) 'Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the **tabernacle of meeting**. (6) 'The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD, **in front of the veil of the sanctuary**. (7) 'And the priest shall put some of the blood on the **horns of the altar of sweet incense** before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the **altar of the burnt offering**, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. (8) 'He shall take from it all the fat of the bull as the sin offering. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat which *is* on the entrails, (9) 'the two kidneys and the fat that *is* on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove, (10) 'as it was taken from the bull of the sacrifice of the peace offering; and the priest shall burn them on the altar of the burnt offering. (11) 'But the bull's hide and all its flesh, with its head and legs, its entrails and offal; (12) 'the whole bull he shall carry **outside the camp** to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and **burn it** on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned."

The next section describes the sacrifice for the whole congregation in similar words. Then in verse 22 begins the law regarding the sin offering for a ruler. It starts out about the same, and then in verse 25 it says:

(Lev 4:25-26 NKJV) "'The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put *it* on the horns of the **altar of burnt offering**, and pour its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. (26) 'And he shall burn all its fat on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of the peace offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him."

There is no mention of what to do with the flesh until Lev 6.

(Lev 6:24-30 NKJV) "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (25) "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'This *is* the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed, the sin offering shall be killed before the LORD. It *is* most holy. (26) 'The priest who offers it for sin shall **eat** it. In a holy place it shall be **eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of meeting**. (27) 'Everyone who touches its flesh **must be holy**. And when its blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled, in a holy place. (28) 'But the earthen vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken. And if it is boiled in a bronze pot, it shall be both scoured and rinsed in water. (29) 'All the males among the priests may eat it. It *is* most holy. (30) '**But no sin offering from which *any* of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of meeting, to make atonement in the holy *place*, shall be eaten. It shall be burned in the fire.**'"

(Lev 16:27 NKJV) "The bull *for* the sin offering and the goat *for* the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy *Place*, shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal."

Sin of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10). Moses asked his cousins to carry them out, and then tried to bring some order to the distressing situation, and maintain the sacredness of the priesthood. He tried to make sure all of the instructions were being carried out, even in the midst of this crisis.

(Lev 10:16-19 NKJV) Then Moses diligently made inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and there it was, burned up. And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron *who were* left, saying, (17) "Why have you not **eaten** the sin offering in a holy place, since it *is* most holy, and *God* has given it to you to bear the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? (18) "See! **Its blood was not brought inside the holy place**; indeed you should have eaten it in a holy *place*, as I commanded." (19) And Aaron said to Moses, "Look, this day they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and such things have befallen me! *If* I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?"

Note that this sin offering required that the priests eat the offering. The very act of doing so was part of the atonement. And the priests were required to be holy, as we saw in Lev. 6. Aaron did not feel he and his sons could adequately fulfill that part of the law, and Moses anger subsided as he reflected on this fact. (v.20)

We saw earlier the significant contrast between the burnt offering and sin offering, in relative numbers, frequency, and purpose. But I also mentioned that there is a third type of offering, and this offering far outnumbered even the burnt offering. That was the peace offering. We can get a sense of this difference in passages like the one in 2 Chronicles 29:

(2 Chr 29:31-33 NKJV) "Then Hezekiah answered and 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 congregation brought in sacrifices and thank offerings, and as many as were of a **willing heart brought** burnt offerings. (32) And the number of the burnt offerings which the congregation brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, *and* two hundred lambs (370 animals); all these *were* for a burnt offering to the LORD. (33) The consecrated things *were* six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep." (3600 animals, nearly 10 times)

Why such a big difference in numbers? And why the mention of a "willing heart" to bring a burnt offering? The key is in the very nature of the peace offering. The burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar. No part of it was eaten. Some of the sin offerings were eaten by the priests, and only the priests. But the peace offerings were shared with everybody.

While we use the terms "offering" and "sacrifice" interchangeably, the scriptures are actually fairly consistent, when translated literally, such as in the King James Version. An offering generally means "burnt offering" or "grain offering" or some other type, a sacrifice generally means "peace offering".

Rules found in Leviticus 3 and 7. As with the sin offering, the blood of a peace offering was poured out on (or beneath) the altar. And the fat and kidneys were burned on the altar. But that is where the similarities with the sin offering end. As with the burnt offering, the fat and kidneys were offered as a "sweet savor" to God. However, except for a portion given the priests (the breast and right shoulder, essentially a tithe), most of the animal was consumed by the offerer. And he had one or two days to do it. And because of this, peace offerings were not personal, they were shared, not only with God and the priest through their portions, but with others. When the people gathered together with peace offerings, they were having a huge barbeque, with family, friends, and strangers.

We are actually quite familiar with peace offerings. The Passover was a peace offering. It followed all the rules of a peace offering except that a portion was not given to the priest, as they had their own Passover lambs.

Where were all of these sacrifices to take place? Since they were eating most of the animal themselves, couldn't they do this at home?

(Lev 17:2-9 NKJV) ""Speak to Aaron, to his sons, and to all the children of Israel, and say to them, 'This *is* the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying: (3) "Whatever man of the house of Israel, kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills *it* outside the camp, (4) "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, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people, (5) "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* peace offerings to the LORD. (6) "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. (7) "They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations." (8) "And you shall say to them: 'Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, (9) 'and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from among his people.'"

(Deu 12:13-27 NKJV) ""Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; (14) "but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you. (15) "However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike. (16) "Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it on the earth like water. (17) "You may not eat within your gates the tithes of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstlings of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. (18) "But you must eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, and the Levite who *is* within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all to which you put your hands. (19) "Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land. (20) "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. (21) "If the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name 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. (22) "Just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat them; the unclean and the clean alike may eat them. (23) "Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood *is* the life; you may not eat the life with the meat. (24) "You shall not eat it; you shall pour it on the earth like water. (25) "You shall not eat it, that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you do *what is* right in the sight of the LORD. (26) "Only the holy things which you have, and your vowed offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the LORD chooses. (27) "And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the meat and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, and you shall eat the meat."

As we read, we are to be living sacrifices, offerings of a sweet-smelling aroma. Are we peace offerings or burnt offerings? A burnt offering was given as praise and thanks to God. A peace offering was shared. The NIV calls these “fellowship” offerings. I would like to suggest that like the 10 commandments, a burnt offering shows love toward God, while peace offerings focus more on love toward neighbor. In that sense, we are to be both.

(Eph 5:1-2 NKJV) Therefore be followers of God as dear children. (2) 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.

The sacrificial system was far more than just atoning for sins. Jesus alone filled the role of a sin offering. And Jesus fulfilled all of the symbolism of the rest of the offerings. But we too have our part to play. The sacrificial system pictures our praise and worship of God and our fellowship with others.