

Offerings in Leviticus—What They Were and Why They Mattered

By Wayne Stiles

Because the offerings in Leviticus had their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, there is no need for them today (Hebrews 10:1-18). In fact, after Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross and rose again, the temple was destroyed in AD 70. No sacrifices have been made there since.

God gave the book of Leviticus to a people already redeemed. The offerings in Leviticus served as God's gracious provision for *how one could regain and sustain fellowship with God*.

1. Burnt Offering

The burnt offering teaches that God is pleased to accept anyone who comes to Him through His prescribed sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3). The whole animal was consumed on the altar, and it atoned for the worshipper's sin. It satisfied God's wrath against sin and made fellowship possible between a holy God and a sinful person.

2. Grain Offering

Someone accepted by God by His grace—through the burnt offering—could respond in gratitude through a grain (or cereal) offering (Leviticus 2:2). It usually was an offering of flour and oil in which a handful was burned and the priests ate the rest. It was a gift to God from the best of the worshipper's agricultural produce in an act of thanksgiving for sins forgiven.

An additional offering, **the drink offering** (or "libation"), was poured on top of the grain offering as a symbol of joy (Leviticus 23:13; cf. Exodus 29:40-41).

3. Peace Offering

Unlike the other offerings, the peace offering was optional, given in addition to the burnt offering. The peace offering closed with a meal, in which the priests (representing God) the worshipper, and his or her friends ate together. The sacrifices had to be eaten in one or two days.

There were three primary peace offerings:

- **Thanksgiving Offering**—a freewill offering given as an act of thanksgiving to God when He blessed someone without their asking for it. Only in this instance could an imperfect animal be offered (Leviticus 7:12-15).
- **Wave offering** - the priest's portion of the peace offering was waved before the Lord as a special act signifying that it was His (Leviticus 7:30-31).
- **Votive Offering**—a freewill offering given because of a vow taken, or in relation to a favor, or a simple voluntary act of worship (Leviticus 7:16-17).

4. Purification (Sin) Offering

Though often called the "sin offering," a better translation is "purification offering." It dealt with two issues: the necessity of forgiveness from unintentional sins and of cleansing from ceremonial uncleanness (Leviticus 4:2-3). The purpose of the sin offering was to *cleanse the tabernacle* from human defilement, thus making possible the continuing fellowship and presence of God among His people.

5. Guilt (Reparation) Offering

The guilt offering caused the individual to look beyond the sin to the damage it caused (Leviticus 5:16). The guilt offering is also called "reparation" because the person not only sought forgiveness, but *first* he or she also paid full restitution, adding to the price an additional percentage.