Sacrifices and Offerings

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Without the Shedding of Blood

Hebrews 9:22 says,

“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission.”

It would be hard to even guess how many animals have been killed in the history of mankind in relation to sin and sacrifice. This practice pre-dates the giving of the Law to Moses as we see patriarchs like Abraham, Job, and Noah offering animal sacrifices for sin. Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices to God. Cain’s was unacceptable because he brought fruit, while Abel brought “the firstborn of his block” (Genesis 4:4-5).

In the Law of Moses God requires numerous sacrifices and offerings to be given. In general, the following principles would apply to all sacrifices:
1. **The animal had to be spotless.**

   “Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf.” And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, to fulfill his vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. Those that are blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to the Lord. Either a bull or a lamb that has any limb too long or too short you may offer as a freewill offering, but for a vow it shall not be accepted. You shall not offer to the Lord what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land. Nor from a foreigner’s hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their corruption is in them, and defects are in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf.” – Leviticus 22:20-25

   “You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God.” – Deuteronomy 17:1

2. **The person offering the sacrifice had to identify with the animal.** The animal needed to be the property of the one offering it. It needed to be an animal that was truly a loss (sacrifice) to the owner. The owner was not to profit from the animal in any way before offering it.

   “Then he (the offerer) shall put his hand on head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.” – Leviticus 1:4

   “All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the Lord your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.” – Deuteronomy 15:19

3. **The person offering the animal had to inflict death upon it.**

   “He (the offerer) 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 (the offerer) shall skin the burnt 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…..but he (the offerer) shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.” – Leviticus 1:5-9

4. **When done in faith, the sacrifice provided a temporary covering for sin.** This in no way contradicts the New Testament teaching that only the blood of Jesus can take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-4). The distinction to be made is that the animal sacrifices were never good enough to fully cover the sinner. They had to continually be offered, whereas the sacrifice of Jesus was perfect; He offered Himself up one time for all time (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 9:28).
“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”
– Leviticus 17:11

The Day of Atonement – “Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabitable land; and he shall release the goat into the wilderness.” – Leviticus 16:21-22

Sacrifices & Offerings

God provides great detail to the Israelites on the various types of sacrifices and offerings they were to give. Some were given because of the sin, others were “freewill” offerings of thanksgiving. Still others were given to help provide for the priesthood.
1. The Burnt Offering
2. The Grain Offering
3. The Peace Offering (NIV – “Fellowship Offering”)
4. The Sin Offering
5. The Trespass Offering (NASV – “Guilt Offering”)

The Burnt Offering is detailed in Leviticus 1, which breaks down the step-by-step process of the sacrifice of an animal from the heard in verses 3-9, an animal from the flock in verses 10-13, and a burnt offering of birds in verses 14-17 (probably a concession for the poor). Stop for a moment and think about the bloody mess involved in the giving of an animal sacrifice. There was nothing quick or simple about offering an animal sacrifice. The offerer did not merely “drop off” the animal and wave goodbye to the priests. The offerer himself was required to kill the animal at the door of the tabernacle. Without the convenience of a modern day slaughter house this would have been extremely messy as the animal had to be skinned, chopped up, the dirt cleaned off of it with water, and then piece by piece it was handed over to the priest who would then place it upon the altar. As the animal is burning upon the fire it is then vaporizing and rising up as a “sweet aroma to the Lord.”

The NKJV uses the phrase “sweet aroma.” The NASV says, “soothing aroma.” The ESV and NIV both say, “pleasing aroma.” The KJV says, “sweet savour unto the Lord.” Paul describes the sacrifice of Christ in Ephesians 5:2 in this way: “Christ has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” The smell of burning flesh is not a smell I would describe as sweet, soothing, or savory, but it is the act of obedience and the resulting fellowship that is pleasing to God.

The significance of the burnt offering was that it was something that ascended to God. The Jews did not consider the animal to have been destroyed. The offerer could visually see the smoke ascend to the heavens and know that God was well pleased to receive his corban, his gift.

And yet, while the sacrifice pleased God, it is important to note that God would have preferred that the Israelite obey His will and not need to sacrifice at all. Sacrifice and the death of an animal’s life was not something that amused God, rather it was a sober reminder that sin had occurred and needed to be atoned for. Jesus said in Mark 12:28-33 that loving God and loving one’s neighbor is more important than all of the burnt offerings that have ever been offered combined. We also remember Samuel’s famous words to King Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.”

Another important point learned from David’s Psalm 51 is that God is more concerned with the disposition of the offerer than He is with the actual sacrifice.

“For 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 and a contrite heart. These, O God, You will not despise” (verses 16-17).
The **Grain Offering** is detailed in Leviticus 2. While the burnt offering made atonement (1:4), the grain offering was more like a financial contribution. It is distinctly different because the former was bloody and blood was required from atonement. This is a bloodless sacrifice. It was an acknowledgement that God is man’s Provider and that all things good come from Him. This was a way to thank God and honor Him with their substance, and it was also a way to provide for the priests and their families.

Just as the animal had to be “without blemish” (1:3) for a burnt offering, “fine flour” was a requirement for the offering of breads and cakes. Oil, frankincense, and salt were added. These items would perfume the altar and provide flavor for the items that would be consumed by the priestly family.

Dig Deeper. After the Temple was built by Solomon the salt for the sacrifices was not brought by the offerer, but was provided at a price, just as the wood was. There was even a chamber in the Temple called the “Chamber of Salt.” It has been reported that no law was more sacredly followed than the application of salt. This is especially interesting in light of what Jesus said in Mark 9:49f – “…every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”

The Grain Offering was presented in many forms, but it was always unleavened and seasoned with salt. This too is a picture of Jesus who was “the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus Himself said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger” (John 6:22ff). Thou My everlasting portion!

The **Peace Offering** is detailed in Leviticus 3. All three offerings covered thus far are described as “a sweet aroma” to God, but the unique aspect of the Peace Offering (“Fellowship Offering” – NIV) is that its purpose was to display the peace between God and man through a feast enjoyed together. While the instructions resemble those of the Burnt Offering in Leviticus 1, the intent here is to place the animal on the altar to cook “as food” (3:11, 16). Leviticus 19:5-8 instruct that the food be eaten the same day as it was offered and the rest was to be burned.

The Peace/Fellowship Offering was enjoyed by the offerer and the priest, but all of the fat was burned on the altar for God. Verse 16 says, “all the fat is the Lord’s.”

The ultimate Peace Offering was Jesus Christ. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Isaiah calls Him the “Prince of Peace” (9:6).

The **Sin Offering** is detailed in Leviticus 4. This offering is specifically purposed to address “unintentional sin” (ASV – “sin unwittingly,” KJV – “sin through ignorance”). People
are often deceived, but even unintentional, ignorant, unwitting sin has a consequence, a price. Sin is marked by God whether man marks it or not. Again, the answer to sin is blood.

Leviticus 4 is broken down into four different applications for the sin offering. Offerings are made for the priest who sins unintentionally, for the congregation of Israel, for the ruler/leader of the nation, and for the common man. The Sin Offering reminds us that all people sin. Every Israelite needed the sin offering.

Two unique facets of this offering are as follows. First, verse 6 tells us the priest will dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle the blood seven times in front of, or against, the veil (literally, “in the face of the veil”). Only on the Day of Atonement, once each year, did the blood go behind the veil for sprinkling on the ark. Here it is sprinkled against the veil. The veil was beautiful and thick, made of scarlet and blue thread, and bearing the design of cherubim angels. Second, we learn from verses 11-12 that the bull (minus the blood and fat) was carried outside the camp to a “clean place” to be burned.

The Sin Offering is another beautiful picture of Jesus, Who was brought outside the city to die (Hebrews 13:11-13). It is also a picture of our own repentance and death. Paul said that we have been crucified with Christ “that the body of sin might be done away with” (Romans 6:6).

The Trespass Offering is detailed in Leviticus 5. It is a sacrifice offered for 3 specific sins:

1. The witness who refuses to testify
2. Accidental defilement – touching something unclean
3. Swearing / Rash vows

Under the Law of Moses there was no Supreme Court or Court of Appeals. There was no jury of 12 or 15 to hear the case. It only took the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses to condemn a person. Bearing false witness was a sin, and so was failing to testify when you knew or saw something relevant to a criminal case brought against an individual. Think of Galatians 6:1 and the Christian obligation to restore another Christian “overtaken” in sin. One cannot simply watch idly and remain silent while their brother or sister falls. The refusal to testify was a sin and therefore required a sacrifice to be given.

Defilement by touching an animal carcass, a dead person, a leper, or someone who has an “issue of blood” would render that person unclean. While these are physical issues, consider the spiritual connotation Paul gave this when he said that no “unclean person” has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5).

A thoughtless vow unfulfilled also required remedy. A blood sacrifice would always be required to make things right with God.
Wrap Up

With the constant sacrificing of innocent animals under the Law of Moses one might wonder if God cared about the animals at all. Yet, it is because God holds the animals in such regard that He would accept their death to atone for the sins of man. One could not offer insects or flowers. The animals required as sacrifices for sin were indeed animals of significance to God and of value to man as well.

Even the Law itself shows God care for the animal kingdom. Exodus 23:12 allows for the working animals to enjoy the Sabbath rest. Deuteronomy 25:4 forbid the muzzling of an ox while it was working. Deuteronomy 22:6-7 forbid the taking of a mother bird and her young. The mother was to be released, which may have been God’s way of protecting against animal extinction. Note also the words of Jesus:

“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them…” – Matthew 6:26

“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.” – Luke 12:6

The animals being sacrificed were innocent, but that was precisely the point. They would serve as a substitute, that is, the animal died in place of the sinner. Unfortunately, they were temporary. Animal sacrifices would be offered over and over again until Jesus Christ provided Himself as the ultimate sacrificial substitute once for all time (Hebrews 7:27, 1 Timothy 2:6). John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Paul said, “God made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).