

## The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part Three): The Meal Offering

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Leviticus 1 gives instruction on the whole burnt offering, which we saw in Part One represents Christ's total devotion to God, revealing in broad strokes the ideal we are to strive for in our relationship with God. The burnt offering has four distinctive characteristics that set it apart from all others. To glean the most from it, it is essential that we remember that these characteristics all describe the same person but from different perspectives, much as the gospel accounts present four views of Christ, or as one would turn a piece of art or craftsmanship to inspect it from different angles. With each little turn, the viewer picks up a new feature that pleases or instructs.

The four distinctive characteristics are:

1. It is a *sweet savor* to God, given not because of sin but out of sincere and heartfelt devotion.
2. It is *offered for acceptance* in the stead of the offerer. The animal represents the offerer.
3. A *life is given*, representing total devotion in every area of life.
4. It is *completely burned up*, also representing total devotion but from a different angle: that it was truly carried out.

The animal was cut into four distinct parts, each signifying an aspect of Christ's character and life: The head represents His thoughts; the legs, His walk; the innards, His feelings; and the fat, His general vigor and health. Every part was put on the altar and totally consumed by the fire.

The variety of animals sacrificed as burnt offerings identify additional characteristics: The bullock typifies untiring labor in service to others; the lamb, uncomplaining submission even in suffering; the goat, strong-minded leadership; and the turtledove, humility, meekness, and mournful innocence.

### Similarities and Differences

Leviticus 2:1 says, "When anyone offers a grain offering to the Lord, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it." The first thing to notice is the name given to it. The King James calls it the "meat" offering, which, in the seventeenth century indicated food in general. Today, because its usage has evolved over the years, *meat* means "flesh." I will use the term "meal" because to us it more accurately describes the main ingredient of this offering—finely ground flour.

The meal offering gives us yet another aspect of the perfect offering of Jesus Christ. As we consider the meal offering, it will be reinforced that the greatest sacrifice of all is the sacrifice of the self. The meal offering shares with the burnt offering the imagery of a meal being set before God. Even as a

meal would not be set before a man consisting only of meat, grains and oil are added to prepare a more complete meal. Tree fruits and garden vegetables were excluded as suitable for offering on the altar.

The offering was not only a gift to God, but there is also a sense of it being the personal property of the offerer, the fruit of his own labor (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 22:25). The meal offering could be given in three forms:

1. In the form of groats, with the fresh ears roasted by fire, or dried grains coarsely rubbed or crushed (Leviticus 2:14).
2. As finely ground wheat or barley flour. These first two forms were covered or mixed with oil and frankincense (verse 1).
3. In the form of loaves or cakes, made of the fine flour mixed with oil. These could be prepared in an oven (verse 4) or upon a flat iron plate (verses 5-6).

Leviticus 2:9 contains an additional feature important to understanding this offering. "Then the priest shall take from the grain offering a memorial portion, and burn it on the altar. It is an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord." Like the burnt offering, it is a sweet savor to God. Another similarity to the burnt offering is its contrast to the sin offering: The offering's intent contains no thought of sin. It represents a man in perfect obedience giving God a sacrifice that He accepts as pleasing to Him.

Leviticus 2:1 supplies us with a key difference from the burnt offering: In addition to fine flour, the meal offering also contains oil and frankincense. These ingredients demonstrate that no life is given, unlike the burnt offering. In the burnt offering, a man offers his life to God, while in the meal offering, he offers the fruit of the ground.

God says to Adam in Genesis 1:29, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food." This verse defines what portion of the earth God allotted to man—its produce. Thus, if we combine our knowledge of the burnt offering, the meal offering, and this verse, we can determine what they symbolize. Life is what God claims as His part of the creation. For example, God commands us not to eat blood (Genesis 9:3-6) because the life "is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:10-14). This implies that life belongs to Him because He gave it, and we are to respect His ownership. We are also to respect the fact that the animal gave its life so we can live.

Within the context of the offerings, life symbolizes what we owe God. In contrast, the grain, oil, and frankincense—the fruit of the earth—symbolize what we owe to man. Both characteristics are our duty. The one is the surrender to God of our life as it is being lived; the other is the fulfillment of our duty to our neighbor.

Matthew 22:36-40 succinctly declares these responsibilities:

"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 neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The burnt offering represents the perfect fulfillment of the first great commandment, and the meal offering corresponds to the second.

Thus, within the context of the meal offering, it is man, represented by the flour, oil, and frankincense, surrendering himself to God so that he may in love give to fellow man what is his due. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Numbers 29:6 adds vital understanding, ". . . besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord." Notice that the word "its" appears twice, conveying that the meal offering belonged to the burnt offering. This demonstrates that the two offerings were offered together. Though the burnt offering may appear to be the "greater" of the two, one is incomplete without the other, even as the two great commandments go together. In each case, the one shows man doing his duty to God, the other, his duty to man.

I John 4:20-21 confirms this:

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

The two must go together. The one without the other is not acceptable to God.

### **The Materials**

Isaiah 28:28 records a practical fact about grain that also affects the spiritual understanding of the meal offering: "Bread flour must be ground; therefore he does not thresh it forever, break it with his cartwheel, or crush it with his horsemen." Grain must be ground or bruised before it can be used as bread or food. John 6:48, 50-51 helps us grasp the major spiritual application:

I am the bread of life. . . . This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.

Bread is the physical staff of life, and Jesus Christ is our spiritual staff of life. Grain is normally ground, usually once, to make bread. The grain of the meal offering, however, was ground many times until it was like talcum powder in consistency.

The symbolism in this is similar to the bullock of the burnt offering—of pressing, wearying, grinding trial. But the difference in this offering is that it represents the effect of such sacrificial service to man. Jesus says in Mark 9:19: "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?" He is almost exasperated, indicating He expected more from His disciples than they were producing.

Matthew 9:18-38 provides us with an example of a typical period in His life, demonstrating that service to man involves considerable self-sacrifice. The Scriptures specifically tell us that He was weary (John 4:6). At other times, Jesus headed for deserted places, but people nonetheless discovered Him and thronged to Him, cutting into any prayer and rest He may have desired. Yet, He set aside

His pleasure and attended to them (Mark 6:32-56). He certainly became bone-weary at times, and there was always the possibility of emotional and psychological pain. The very people He served were likely to inflict the pain. As Scripture relates, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

Psalms 69:1-2, 19-20 gives us a small window into His feelings at such times:

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. . . . You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.

The psalmist provides a vivid picture of a person dealing with so many pressing issues at once that he feels as if he were drowning. Undoubtedly, He bore His sacrifices, rejections, and reproaches without complaint to those He was serving (I Peter 2:23). But this does not mean they did not affect His feelings and did not take them to God for comfort and consolation.

Psalms 55:12-14 adds His thoughts during a particularly heartfelt circumstance:

For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has magnified himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng.

This brief insight reveals that the most bitter and difficult reproaches frequently come from those from whom we expect the most.

Psalms 22:14-15 describes a small portion of the most horrific "grinding" Christ endured in His service to man: "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death." Christ was ground in body and spirit. In this case, He was bruised so badly He was barely recognizable as a man (Isaiah 52:14) and was so sapped of strength that He could not bear His cross of crucifixion alone. Another was compelled to bear it for Him because Jesus was already figuratively ground and ready to be put on the altar.

The lesson for us is that service to our fellow man is self-surrender and self-sacrifice. The nearer our service approaches His degree of self-sacrificing service the more we will resemble what happened to Him. We, too, will find ourselves bruised.

Remember that the flour was ground like talcum. This symbolizes that neither His character nor the character of His service contained any inconsistency. Hebrews 13:8 declares, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." In Him is perfect balance. He is firm but not obstinate, gentle but not weak, calm but not indifferent, kind and merciful but able to correct. By comparison, Peter could step out and walk on water then turn and deny Him.

Another disciple who walked with Christ, John, seems to have had an affectionate nature, but he also wanted to sit at Christ's right hand in the Kingdom and call fire down from heaven. Paul's great

energy leads him to Macedonia, but God had opened the door to Troas. Paul repents of writing a stern letter to Corinth, but then was moved to regret it.

Such is the unevenness in us. We may show strong faith in one area and be quite weak in another. We may tithe with regularity and give offerings with generosity yet treat the Sabbath with disrespect. Or, we may keep the Sabbath punctiliously but lie when it is convenient to save face. We may be exceedingly careful nothing unclean passes our lips and into our stomach yet judge others severely, blaspheme God by misusing His name, and gossip about a brother. We may be the first to help the needy but practice respect of persons with a sickening regularity. We have a long way to go before we exhibit Christ's righteous consistency of character.

## **The Oil and Power**

The next ingredient is oil. Leviticus 2:1-2 says:

When anyone offers a grain 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.

Oil is a widely understood symbol of the Holy Spirit and thus does not require a detailed explanation, but one scripture will suffice to link the Holy Spirit and oil directly:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. . . . (Luke 4: 18)

"The Spirit of the Lord" and the oil of anointing are directly linked. The oil of anointing stands as a physical representation of Jesus being given the Spirit to perform these functions for God in His service to man.

Acts 10:38 reveals another aspect of this symbolism: ". . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." Again, reference is made to anointing—an act normally done with oil—with the Holy Spirit, and Peter adds "with power," a characteristic not included in Luke 4:18.

Though Jesus was bruised in service, He never lacked power. By contrast, we are rarely bruised, broken, or ground in service, but we are usually powerless. The truth is, the greatest zeal and knowledge are useless without God's Holy Spirit providing the right perspective, attitude, and intention for any service we perform.

A few weeks before Christ's ascension to the Father, Jesus teaches His disciples on this subject:

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it

was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:44-49)

John 17:8, 17 confirms that Jesus gave the disciples the truth:

For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. . . . Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

At the time of His instruction in Luke 24, they had the truth, but an additional quality had yet to be given. They were to wait in Jerusalem until anointed with the power, "the love of God . . . poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). By this they could rightly use the truth. II Timothy 1:6-7 reveals that we have that power if we will use it in service as Christ did: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

In the burnt offering, water is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, signifying cleansing. In the meal offering, the oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the power to do good with proper motivation in service to man.

The next offering ingredient is frankincense. It should be considered in conjunction with honey, leaven, and salt. Notice Leviticus 2:2, 11, 13:

He shall bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of the 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. . . . No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire. . . . And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.

Only one of these four ingredients, leaven, has a clear scriptural reference to its qualities. Two of them, frankincense and salt, have veiled references. The Bible refers to honey only as desirable and sweet and that eating too much will make one sick. However, because all of their physical characteristics and uses are well known, there is no problem determining their spiritual symbolism.

Nearly forty times in the Old Testament, God declares how pleasing the aroma of a burnt offering is. This positive imagery of scent represents God's satisfaction in experiencing the proper worship of Him. In the meal offering, frankincense contributes to His satisfaction because it always accompanies the burnt offering.

Frankincense has a sweet fragrance, and honey a sweet taste, but the effect of heat—representing the pressure of trials—on them is vastly different. Heat corrupts, breaks down, and eventually destroys honey. This characteristic is probably why God did not permit its use in the sacrifices. However, frankincense does not release its greatest fragrance until heat is applied.

Incense has a long history of use in offerings to God. The priests used it daily on the incense altar, which stood directly in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holies of Holies where God's throne, the Ark of the Covenant, stood. The incense billowed up in a smoky cloud, filling the rooms with a fragrant odor. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest burned incense in the Holy of Holies itself before the Ark.

Isaiah 6:1, 4 describes the vision Isaiah saw of God's heavenly dwelling place:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. . . . And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

The imagery of the smoke of incense and its fragrance, representing the prayers of the saints is well known. For instance, Psalm 141:2 says, "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." Revelation 5:8 confirms this: "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

However, in the context of the meal offering, incense carries additional significance because of its overall meaning of dedication in service to man. Notice Jesus' words in Matthew 13:20-21:

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation of persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Incense portrays a person's attitude during his trials endured in service to fellow man. A person might be all sweetness and light until the hardship of service hits him, and he grows bitter and turns aside.

Frequently, a Christian's trials involve people, often those close to him: relatives, business coworkers, or social acquaintances. Nothing is more consistently difficult than interpersonal relationships. Paul writes in Philippians 2:14-15, "Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." He tells the Corinthians, ". . . nor murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer" (I Corinthians 10:10). Finally, Peter advises, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling" (I Peter 4:9). Frankincense represents the pleasant satisfaction God experiences when His children endure without grumbling the hardships of unstinting service, especially to their brethren.

### **Salt and Faithfulness**

Like frankincense and honey, salt and leaven also produce contrasting reactions when used. Salt preserves from corruption, while leaven corrupts and deteriorates what it is inserted into. Unlike frankincense and honey, the Scriptures contain a great deal about these two in their application to the meal offering.

» **II Chronicles 13:5:** Should you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt?

» **Psalm 89:34-37:** My covenant will I not break, nor alter the word that is gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me, it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky. Selah.

Here, a covenant of salt suggests an agreement of enduring qualities, even forever. Thus a covenant of salt is one that is very strong, though it may not always be everlasting. Salt is understood to be the preservative, suggesting endurance. When God makes use of this metaphor, He is urging us to be faithful despite how circumstances appear on the surface because His Word is absolutely sure. Like Himself, His Word endures forever.

Salt was required in every sacrifice burned on the altar. Besides its preserving factor, it also has a purifying affect on what it comes in contact with. Ezekiel 16:4 records that newborn babies were rubbed with salt. In addition, Elisha treated a bad water supply in Jericho with salt. Besides purifying, then, it also signifies a new beginning.

### **Leaven, Corruption and Sin Within**

By contrast, Jesus warns us in Luke 12:1 about leaven: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Throughout Matthew 23, Jesus lists a multitude of Pharisaical sins that could be grouped as legalistic externalism.

In Matthew 16:6, Jesus warns of the leaven of the Sadducees. The Sadducees' sins are not listed, but elsewhere we find they at least denied the supernatural and the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). Jesus also warns of the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15). Herod was involved in a great deal of lying in his political wheeling and dealing, abusing the power of his office, adultery, and general all-around worldliness.

Paul commands in I Corinthians 5:7-8:

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Thus, in the New Testament leaven signifies wickedness and malice in contrast to sincerity and truth.

All of our offerings to God are mixed with some measure of sin. Has He made allowance for this in His instructions for the offerings? Yes.

No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire. As for the offering of the firstfruits, you shall offer them to the Lord, but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet aroma. (Leviticus 2:11-12)

Leviticus 23:17, 20 clarifies this:

You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.



... The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.

This Pentecost offering is a meal offering. The loaves represent Christians accepted before God because of Jesus Christ. However, because the loaves contained leaven, symbolizing the reality of sin in our lives, they are waved before God and accepted but not burned on the altar, recognizing the presence of that sin.

Romans 7:14-20 makes a powerful statement on this:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

No matter how much oil—the Holy Spirit—is poured out on us, it cannot completely counteract the corrupting effect of the leaven. We can control the flesh sufficiently so sin does not rule us, but sin is ever with us, and as long as we have human nature, that cannot be changed.

The only solution is that we must be changed—totally—and that is in our future, according to I Corinthians 15:50-52:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

The meal offering was not wholly burned on the altar, but it was completely consumed between the altar and the priests, who ate the portion that was not put on the altar. This portrays that the meal offering was primarily intended for man. The amount actually offered was only a handful of a larger amount. But even so, Leviticus 2:1 says that the meal offering was "to the Lord."

With this in mind, we should compare what Adam did with what Jesus Christ, the second Adam, did. In the Garden of Eden, God reserved one tree for himself, but Adam not only took what was his, but he also took for himself what was God's. In contrast, Jesus gave God not only God's portion but even the first part of man's portion too.

Notice the apostle Paul's attitude in I Thessalonians 2:6: "Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." The meal offering largely speaks of our attitude in service to man. As Paul says, service is not to be done with gain for the self in mind. Are we seeking God's gifts to gain a position in the church once our good works are recognized? If we labor for man's acceptance, then, if men do not react as we think they should, the fruit will ultimately be discouragement and bitterness. We will become offended and quit.

Through Christ we can learn the correct approach. His service to man was always *an offering to the Lord*. How men reacted was not His major concern. If men reject us and we become bitter, critical, and accusative, we can know we gave our service in the wrong attitude—because "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit" (Matthew 7:18).

Christ is our example. He never stopped giving because His offerings of service were always to the Lord. They were never to glorify Himself. And in this manner, He fulfilled the second of the two great commandments.