

## **The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part Six): The Sin Offering**

**by John W. Ritenbaugh**

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The previous articles in this series have dealt only with the sweet-savor offerings, commonly called the whole burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering. With this article, we shall begin comparing the distinctions between the sweet-savor offerings and the sin offerings. Some striking differences exist between the two categories, one of the more prominent being that we are to understand that sin plays no role in the sweet-savor offerings. They were offered for God's acceptance on behalf of the worshipper—but not because the worshipper had sinned. God accepted him because of his devotion, represented by his offering.

Such is not the case with the sin and trespass offerings. Sin is very much part of these offerings. As such, they are not a sweet savor to God. He is merciful and will forgive based on Christ's sacrifice, which these offerings represent, but even though He accepts the offerings, He takes no satisfaction in sin. Sin is described throughout the Bible as abominable, remarkably hateful, and evil to God. Even though sin is described by exceedingly vivid adverbs and adjectives, it is still, nonetheless met and covered by the sacrifice of Christ.

### **Which Came First?**

Leviticus 9:1-10 states,

It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. And he said to Aaron, "Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the Lord. And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before the Lord, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today the Lord will appear to you.'" So they brought what Moses commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord. Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded you to do, and the glory of the Lord will appear to you." And Moses said to Aaron, "Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as the Lord commanded." Aaron therefore went to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. Then the sons of Aaron brought the blood to him. And he dipped his finger in the blood, put it on the horns of the altar, and poured the blood at the base of the altar. But the fat, the kidneys, and the fatty lobe from the liver of the sin offering he burned on the altar, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

This series of verses takes place immediately after the giving of the instructions for the offerings. The priesthood's ordination and installation into their offices of service at the altar and Tabernacle are about to take place. Verses 2-10 are unique because they are instructions for what will be the first offerings given by the Aaronic priesthood.

Does it not seem plausible that they made the offerings in the correct order the first time they performed them, when little time had passed for people to forget God's commands or even deceitfully corrupt their purity? Moses received the instruction from God, he passed them on to Aaron, and the priests carried them out.

They did so in an interesting progression. Obviously, the order of instruction from God in the first few chapters of Leviticus begins with the burnt offering and proceeds through the meal, peace, sin, and trespass offerings. Did the priests place the offerings on the altar in exactly the same progression? Does it make any difference? Yes, it makes a difference to us because it made a difference to God.

The Bible provides two different orders. The teaching order is given beginning in Leviticus 1. God, it seems, wants us to learn first about devotion to Him and fellow man portrayed by the burnt and meal offerings, as well as our devotion's fruits—gratitude, peace, and fellowship—pictured by the peace offering. Following that, His instruction proceeds on to the sin and trespass offerings. However, when the rituals were actually performed at the altar, the sin offering happened first.

Leviticus 9:8 clearly states that the calf of the sin offering was killed first. Aaron then placed the blood from that calf upon the horns of the altar and poured the remainder of its blood at the base of the altar. Following that, its fat, kidneys, and liver lobe were burned on the altar (verse 10), but its flesh and hide were burned outside the camp (verse 11). Not until those ceremonies were fulfilled was the ram of the burnt offering killed, its blood caught, and all its parts burned atop the altar along with its meal offering (verses 12-14).

Investigating why the instruction order was given one way and the practical application order another should prove both logical and helpful. It helps to remember that Christ is the object of all the offerings. The burnt offering pictures His perfect devotion and obedience to God in keeping the first four commandments. The meal offering depicts an equally perfect devotion and obedience in keeping the remaining six commandments, which apply to relationships with other men. The peace offering shows the perfect communion produced. This sequence portrays His sinless performance in living 33½ years, enabling Him to become the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

This describes what made Him the perfect sin offering. We cannot approach God as a whole burnt offering because we have not devoted ourselves to God and man in perfect sinlessness. Our devotion is flawed. We are not qualified to be a sin offering because we have sinned. We are imperfect, to say the least.

The only way we can approach God is to have the way cleared before us by a perfect sin offering made in our behalf, which in turn prepares the way for us to become acceptable burnt and meal offerings. The perfect sin offering must precede us so we can be accepted before God. We cannot come to God through our own works because they are badly tarnished. We may come to Him only through the work of the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Once God accepts us into His presence, the love of God begins to be shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). This works to change our heart, preparing us to yield and keep His commandments faithfully in both letter and spirit.

## **A Second and Third Reason**

There is a secondary reason for this sequence that is not unimportant to recognize. This is also the order that our knowledge of Christ and especially the profundity of His sacrifice are revealed to us. Having grown up in America, regardless of whether as a Protestant, Catholic, agnostic, atheist, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or whatever, the first thing we ever learn about Jesus Christ is that He died for our sins. We know that He died for our sins long before we begin to understand and appreciate the perfection of His life. What comes first is a mere factual knowledge that He sacrificed His life as payment for our sins. Usually, it is not until we attempt to walk in His steps and strive to be perfect that any depth of understanding of His accomplishment blossoms.

Even as we were coming into the church guided by personal Bible study, booklets, articles, and sermons, becoming aware of our need for repentance, and being covered and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, this fact was foremost in our mind. We do not even begin to value the perfection of His submission to the Father as a burnt and meal offering until we try to live perfectly ourselves. Then, it begins to dawn on us what a marvelous thing He accomplished—perfection in living.

This may not be a perfect illustration, but perhaps it will help nonetheless: Imagine that every time a person drove from the golf tee, he hit a hole in one; or shot for the basketball hoop, he scored; or swung his baseball bat, he connected for a home run! Sports are ultimately meaningless activities and these wonderful but impossible athletic accomplishments mere vanities in comparison to the importance and difficulty of what Jesus accomplished.

Thus, the order of application shows how we must come to view and understand Christ's importance to us. First, we believe and request the sin offering to be applied to us, then we progress to the perfection of the burnt and meal offerings. The Bible presents the instruction in the other direction because God wants to impress on our minds as we begin to understand that, in order for Christ to become a sin offering, He first had to be perfect. This allows us to appreciate what He did to a far greater degree.

The apostle Paul warns us in I Corinthians 11:29 not to partake of the Passover bread and wine without discerning the Lord's body. A deeply appreciative and perceptive understanding of Christ's sacrifice is possible only in those who have strived to emulate Him by being living sacrifices, not conforming to this world, and having our mind renewed by His Spirit as we endeavor to go on to perfection (see Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 6:1).

A third reason for the application order beginning with the sin offering is that it reminds us how our communion, our fellowship, with God is established. We do not go to God on our own strength but with a sin offering preceding us. We are permitted into the heavenly Holy of Holies because the veil was rent by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We did not rend the veil through our works. The continuous application of the sin offering establishes and maintains our communion with God. Our use of this knowledge is definitely not limited to initiating fellowship with God because we sin after our initial cleansing and need His forgiveness repeatedly.

Leviticus 4:3, 13, 22, 27 contain additional, helpful information:

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. . . . Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which should not be done, and are guilty. . . . When a ruler has

sinned, and done something unintentionally against any of the commandments of the Lord his God in anything which should not be done, and is guilty. . . . If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty. . . .

These charges cover every stratum of society. Thus, God addresses all sins not willfully and rebelliously committed.

### **Atonement and the Offerings**

The English word *atonement* appears in Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35 in reference to these sin offerings, as it does in Leviticus 1:4 in reference to the burnt offering: "Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him." This is the last time "atonement" appears in reference to the sweet-savor offerings in Leviticus 1-3.

"Atonement" may mislead some because we almost automatically think of a covering for sin. Atonement for sin normally makes one acceptable before God, but sin is not present in the sweet-savor offerings. Nonetheless, the word indeed conveys the sense of acceptance but on a different basis than in the sin and trespass offerings. The basis for acceptance in the sweet-savor offerings is the offerer's perfect devotion, picturing the devoted, sinless Christ worshipping God.

Concerning the sin and trespass offerings, "atonement" is used in the way we normally understand it: as a covering, payment, expiation, or propitiation made for sin. It is as though the offerer is charged just as the police charge a person with a crime. In this case, though, the offerer is charged with sin, and something must expiate it. The sin and trespass offerings, then, indicate the payment of a legal obligation to an authority, one that meets the legal requirement of that authority. To expiate sin, the payment must be in blood; a life must be given. The Authority is God, as His law has been broken.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Whenever a person sins, the law has the power to take that person's life. It has such power over us that, for our debt to be paid, a life is required. Nothing less is suitable to expiate sin. In the symbolism of the sin and trespass offerings, the life of an animal is given, covering the indebtedness and breaking the power the law has over us.

In actual practice, the ritual proceeded like this: The offerer brought his animal before the priest and then laid his hand upon the head of his offering. Symbolically, a transfer took place so that the animal is understood as portraying the sinner making the offering. The animal then died, and the penalty was considered paid.

In Romans 6:2, Paul writes that we are "dead to sin," and in Romans 7:4, that we are "dead to the law." The ritual portrays these truths. The sin and trespass offerings picture a convicted sinner coming before God to receive the judgment of death. However, the animal's death portrays Christ's vicarious death in our stead, for in reality, since He is the offering, our sins have been transferred to Him. In this way, we are atoned for and redeemed.

### **Redemption Only Through Perfection**

Although these offerings are not sweet saviors, they had to be just as perfect as the burnt and meal offerings. The animal had to be without blemish to compare favorably with Christ's sinlessness. In addition, animals cannot sin, so as long as the offerer selected a properly unblemished animal, it was seen as a good substitute to represent Christ symbolically.

Peter writes:

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (I Peter 1:17-19)

Redemption involves buying back something that has been taken away. Herbert Armstrong spoke metaphorically of our being kidnapped by Satan. Because he has forcibly held us from the liberty God wants us to experience, we must be redeemed. We are in this humanly inescapable predicament because we have sinned in following the same manner of living as everybody else. We are released from this by means of the payment of the sinless life of Jesus Christ in a vicarious death in our place and by our repentance. Because He was sinless, our sinful imperfections can be overcome and paid for.

Would imperfection in an animal disqualify it from being offered on the altar? Yes, very much so, even if the imperfection was internal and invisible to the eye. If it had a lame leg, or if its hide was marred by scarring or was ragged and mangy in appearance, it was not acceptable. If one of its eyes had been gouged out or was infected, or if its ear had been torn by a predator, it was disqualified. If it had a disease, even an internal cancer or tumor, it was unfit, even though it might have looked reasonably healthy to casual, external observation so that only the owner knew of its imperfection.

Each of these physical flaws represents spiritual imperfections that could have been in Christ except that He was perfect in all His ways. For 33½ years, He never once had even a single, tiny, solitary moral or spiritual imperfection. He never did anything unethical, immoral, or unspiritual. Not one instance of any kind of carnality marred His life. Even if the thought of sin arose in Him, He quickly put it out of His mind. Always, in every instance, He used the mind of God.

Thus, sin never desecrated or blemished Him in any way, internally or externally. He did not carry around any envy, bitterness, or gall—there was nothing in Him that would disqualify Him in any way from being a fit sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. It is astounding that anyone could live this way for even a day or two, let alone 33½ years!

Christ qualified in every way to be the sacrifice for our sins. Consider, however, that the literal sin offering He made at His crucifixion took only a few hours to unfold. By comparison, His efforts to qualify to be the sin offering by being a perfect burnt, meal, and peace offering required 33½ years of sinless living!

Reflecting upon what Christ accomplished is sobering to anyone of a mature mind who has attempted to duplicate even a small portion of what He did. It should certainly lead us to the deepest gratitude we can offer. Isaiah 53:9-10 gives us an insight into God's attitude toward His Son's sacrifice:

And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

Not even one time did Christ's heart rise up in an attempt to deceive or to strike out in violent anger. He was childlike in attitude yet mature in His wisdom, but it pleased God to bruise and put Him to grief as the offering for our sins.

### **A Great Payment Creates Obligations**

This is in sharp contrast to what I John 1:8 through 2:1 says about us:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

John is instructing us about the obligation we have due to receiving atonement through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness does not remove from us the obligation to keep the commands of God. The law of God is not done away once we are under the blood of Jesus Christ. His death paid for our *past* sins. Though His death will pay for sins committed after our original forgiveness, we are urged not to break God's laws. Sinning without serious regard and deep appreciation for Christ's death brings us into danger of committing the unpardonable sin (Hebrews 10:26, 28-29). A disciplined and robust effort to obey God's commands witnesses to Him the depth of our appreciation for the grace He gives through Christ.

Hebrews 10:1 reflects upon the place the Old Testament offerings have in giving understanding of Jesus Christ: "For 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." The sacrificial laws only portrayed reality; they were enacted to depict something greater to come. What Leviticus 1-5 describes is the shadow of the good things; Christ is the reality.

Why could they not make a person perfect who believed in them and offered them? Why did One so great have to die so that we might live? An illustration from a dollars-and-cents basis may help us understand. Can something of lesser value, an animal, equal the cost of something of greater value, a man? Is a bull, lamb, goat, or turtledove worth as much as a human being?

What if a person went into a store to purchase—redeem, compensate for, propitiate, expiate—an item costing a hundred dollars, but he offered to pay only fifty dollars? What would the owner say? Would he not say, "You don't have enough here to pay for this, so you cannot have it." So, he leaves and returns with a twenty-dollar bill. The owner says, "That still is not enough." Leaving again, he returns with a ten-dollar bill. It is still not enough. In the analogy, he must repeat this process continually, always attempting to use something of lesser value to receive something of greater value.

Consider, however, what God did. We are the item being purchased, and our redemption price—our cost to Him—is the expiation of our sins. God laid down a multi-trillion dollar note to redeem us: Christ. God gave the life of the Creator to pay the penalty for sin. He did not offer a lesser being for us—an animal is not sufficient to redeem even one human. God came through with a payment that is not merely adequate to meet the cost of one person's redemption, but is so great it satisfies the cost for all the sins of the whole of mankind for all time! God met the total indebtedness of all mankind with one payment.

The last phrase of Hebrews 10:1 says that the animal sacrifices did not make those who followed them perfect. In verse 2, the writer follows this with the question, "For then would they not have ceased to be offered?" He is providing evidence that no animal, no matter how unblemished, can pay the price of a man's sins because a human is worth too much. In verse 3, he proclaims that the sacrifices only reminded the people of how sinful they were and that their sins had yet to be paid for. In verse 4, he concludes that it is just not possible for any animal to pay for the sins of any man.

God simply will not accept the blood of an animal for the life of a man. The sacrificial law was a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24), intended by God to instruct by putting people through the exercise of making the sacrifice. How much those making the actual offerings learned is unknown, but they are very effective teachers for those of us under the New Covenant, if we incline our minds to them and seek God's help in understanding. Above all, they teach us the value of Christ's sacrifice.

### **Once for All**

The instruction continues in Hebrews 10:5-7, a monologue in which God the Son, Savior and Creator of mankind, addresses the Father:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do your will, O God.'"

He explains that, when He came into the world, God provided Him with a human body, thus enabling Him to be a sacrifice. He carries this thought further by saying that God did not desire the Levitical offerings to serve as the means of forgiveness and acceptance before Him. Rather, God sent Him into the world to fulfill His will—to be the sacrifice for mankind's sins.

Hebrews 10:9-10 confirms this and progresses the thought one step further: "Then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." God's purpose was to remove the Levitical sacrifices ("the first") and replace them with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ ("the second"). In terms of power and value, this sacrifice is of such magnitude that, once made, it is sufficient to cover all sins. It does not have to be made repeatedly.

The writer adds in verses 11-12: "And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God." This part of God's creative work in us is finished! There will be no more sacrifice for man's sins. Christ sat down; this aspect of His work is done.

Verses 14-18 then dogmatically state:

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them." Then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

II Corinthians 5:18-19 adds important considerations to this subject:

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Part of the responsibility of the church of God in preaching the gospel around the world is to inform mankind how they can be reconciled to God. In many cases, people do not even know they are separated from God. However, all have been separated from Him, and all need to be reconciled to God through the redemption offered in Christ's payment for sin. To do this, we must also proclaim what sin is, as many are equally ignorant of what constitutes sin. Doing this enables them to judge their need for reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

### **He Became Sin for Us**

Preaching the gospel is not just about the Kingdom of God but includes many attendant features that flesh out understanding necessary for establishing communion with God. Paul goes on to say, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (verses 20-21).

As the Offerer, Jesus brought Himself, as it were, to God's altar, and then offered Himself before God as the sin offering. When He did that, our sins fell on His head as His responsibility, and He became sin personified. Our sins thus caused Him—for the first time in His life—to be cut off from God. Our sins, now His sins, caused Him to be judged, rejected, and slain, for the wages of sin is death.

No longer a sweet savor to God, He was cast out of the camp, that is, cast from God's presence. With His judgment, justice was satisfied. Because He took our sins upon Him and justice has been satisfied, God has judged us in Him, and He can now forgive us. In this manner, God can legally meet the requirements of His law: that sin can be expiated only by death. Because we are judged in Christ and He has already been judged, we are also judged already and free and clear of sin.

This is a most encouraging truth to understand: There is no death penalty hanging over us! Because our sins were transferred to Him, Christ was the One rejected and put out of the camp. This fact was acted out in the course of the ritual of the sin offering: "But the bull's hide and all its flesh, with its head and legs, its entrails and offal—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" (Leviticus 4:11-12).



At this point, it is good to consider a major aspect of Christ's life and what it means to us. From the time recorded in Mark 1, when Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel, His life was 3½ years of trials of ever-increasing intensity. Though there were undoubtedly periods when He was relatively free of persecution, they nonetheless mounted toward a crescendo. It was especially so around Jerusalem, where those in power feared Him because, as they said, "Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12:19). John 7 shows that His own family did not believe in Him. Even of those closest to Him, the apostles, one betrayed Him outright, and the others abandoned Him out of fear for their own lives.

Through it all, we find in Him a story of undaunted courage. He gave every impression of being fearless and faithful to the *n*th degree. He kept going forward wisely, discreetly, enduring whatever came upon Him in carrying out His mission. In the end He had to endure the taking away of His freedom; an unfair, illegal trial; conviction; scourging; and death.

While being crucified, He makes a telling statement by crying out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Could it be that this provides insight into the only thing He feared—the loss of contact and communication with His Father—and that He did not know what He would do then?

We need to consider this deeply and appreciatively because this is the great gift made available to us by Christ's sacrifice. Fellowship with God, being at peace with Him, and having access to Him are admittance to the very fountain of living waters. We can safely say that, once our sins are covered by Christ's blood, access to God is the source of all spiritual strength and growth because the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us (Romans 5:1-5).

Hebrews 13:10 tells us, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." This altar is God's table. We are fed spiritual food from this spiritual altar. Jesus said in John 6:63, "The words I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." The priests were permitted to eat of the peace, sin, and trespass offerings. Thus those who serve at the altar are fed at the altar. We are now part of a spiritual priesthood. It is our responsibility to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:5).

Hebrews 13:11-12 concludes, "For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate." God will not budge one inch with His law even when the sinner is His own Creator Son. Is sin serious to us? Do we appreciate the sacrifice of Christ?

Long before His actual sacrifice, God laid the groundwork of instruction in Leviticus so we would thoroughly understand and truly appreciate what has been done to provide us, so pitifully weak and undeserving, access to Him to receive forgiveness and strength.