

Leviticus chapters one through seven teach about the voluntary offerings the people of Israel could make to the Lord at his place of worship. The book of Leviticus deals a lot with sacrifices of every kind. Jesus' New Testament Apostles cannot help but see things and explain things in light of the Old Testament worship and all its parts and all its sacrifices. They try to teach us about our New Testament life in terms of the OT temple worship but if we don't know about the OT temple worship then much of what the apostles teach is lost on us. Let today be the last day of such business and the first day and the beginning of new and wonderful understanding of what God is doing in his church and in our lives and may such learning change us in a positive spiritual way for ever.

The closing chapters of Exodus, the book that comes right before this one in the Bible, contains the details about the tabernacle that was to be built. The tabernacle was where God would meet with his people. There would be a lot going on at the tabernacle, especially with all the sacrifices that would be made there in the Lord's court. Leviticus, then, begins with some specific instructions about the sacrifices that would be made in this holy place. However, the book does not just pick up where Exodus leaves off. It does not just move headlong into the main public offerings that the priests would be working with every day. Instead, it shifts the focus to the individual Israelites and their families. There were a few details God had to get squared away with the Israelites before everything was ready to get started, such as all the offerings to be made for the priests before they could get going, and so on. These things are taken care of in the first chapters of Leviticus. Also, God did not establish worship at the tabernacle just for the benefits of the priests. It was for the benefit of all the people. So here in the opening chapters of Leviticus God gives his instructions on how the people themselves could and would participate in the rites of the tabernacle and therefore be assured of the favor and blessing of the Lord. With that in mind, I think the best way to move forward is to go ahead and take a look at Leviticus chapter one.

The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.

“If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Then he shall kill the bull before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

“If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish, and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. And he shall cut it into pieces, with its head and its fat, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar, but the entrails and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

“If his offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or pigeons. And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. He shall remove its crop with its contents and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes. He shall tear it open by its wings, but shall not sever it completely. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

Here in chapter one, the Lord begins his instructions on the three voluntary offerings the people could bring before the Lord at the tabernacle. They could make these offerings anytime they felt moved to do so, desiring to come near to the Lord and make sure everything was copacetic between the Lord and them. Interestingly, to illustrate how these three voluntary offerings were linked in their institution and purpose, chapters one, two, and three of Leviticus in the original

Hebrew actually comprise one, super-long, hyper-extended sentence! There was a precise order to these three voluntary offerings. First came the burnt offering which consisted of animals. After that had been placed on the altar of burnt offering, then the grain offering when on top of the animal offering. After the grain offerings had been placed on top of the animal offerings, then the peace offering of animal fat, kidneys, and liver were placed on top of the grain offering. In this way, all three of the offerings became as one offering to the Lord, with the burnt animal offering being the base and foundation of the entire works. We will get back to the theological meaning of this point later on. After everything was in place on the altar, the priest stoked the flame and it burned so hot that the entire pile of offerings were turned into smoke. There was nothing left after the sacrifice was complete. The offerings had transitioned from the physical world to the spiritual world, to the dwelling place of God.

And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. Leviticus 1:9

Here it actually says the priests are to “send up in smoke” the offerings on the altar. It also says here that this smoke from the offering is a “pleasing aroma to the Lord.” We can easily make the connection of the smoke to a pleasing aroma. It reminds me of when I was a kid back in small-town Wisconsin. Every fall we would rake the leaves into the gutter and then burn them. The whole town was filled with the pleasing aroma of leaves being sent up in smoke: oak, maple, birch, elm, chestnut, etc. I can still smell the pleasing aroma of those leaves.

Of course for us there is much more to all this than sending perfectly good meat and potatoes up in smoke. Let’s take a look at those regulations on sacrifice a little closer.

“If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish.” Leviticus 1

We could list lots of reason why God required an animal in perfect condition. After all, he is God and deserves the very best of the flock, right? But why a male? Males represented the head of the family. Seems like God is leading up to something more here. And he is.

... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:14

These unblemished bulls and sheep and goats offered on the altar of burnt offering at the tabernacle of the Lord and assured the people they had the favor and the blessing of the Lord clearly pointed to the offering of Jesus Christ, the unblemished, perfect, sinless lamb of God on the cross. Because Jesus offered himself for us, we now have the guarantee of God's favor and blessing. What about the "sending up in smoke as a pleasing aroma to God" end of things? Hmmm ...

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:2

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross did bring a pleasing aroma to God. It assures us that he is pleased and we can approach him unafraid, seeking the full measure of his grace and favor. There is much more where all of this came from, so hopefully next week we can look further into all the connections between the Old Testament and New, and how the faith of all God's people is fulfilled and unified in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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