

The Sin Offering – A Picture of Forgiveness

by: George Bell

Leviticus 4

Freewill offerings

When we look back over the first three offerings in Leviticus (the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering) and then consider the fourth: the sin offering, there are differences, but they blend into one whole. Each stands out just as when we view the landscape while passing through beautiful scenery. At every turn something fresh catches the eye. The view continually changes and yet each feature seems to blend in with the whole to make that view complete. All are in harmony. A divine hand is observed throughout. The closer we look, the more perfect it is seen to be. It is the Person who created the universe in perfection who has given us this four-fold sight of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only by this one sacrifice we are able to consider the God who designed it all, showing His heart of love toward people like ourselves.

The question might arise in someone's mind, Why is the sin offering and trespass offering last to be described? Considering the gravity of sin before a holy God, why was it not first? The Bible says that sin is lawlessness, that is self-will, and separates us from God. We are all sinners and in need of someone able to remove the distance. The first of the four offerings is therefore the burnt offering, which was burnt as a sweet savour. No one had any part of the burnt offering, except that the skin was given to the priest. The word "burnt" means *cause to ascend*. The burnt offering points to the Lord Jesus offering Himself in willing devotion to do the will of God. His obedience to God is paramount. There could be no offering to deal with my sin, were there not One willing to do it.

The first three offerings are often referred to as freewill offerings. There was no compulsion as to what the worshippers offered, but only as their heart prompted them. It may have been an act of worship, or a vow etc.

The sin offering - a compulsory offering

But when it was a sin offering, it was different; they had no choice in the matter. When they sinned, God dictated the form of offering they must bring. There could be no forgiveness otherwise. It must be pointed out that the people involved in all the ritual of sacrifice were in relationship with God because of the offerings of the Day of Atonement once a year. So, if we apply the sin offering to ourselves as Christians, it will be the work of the Lord Jesus as the Advocate that we need. Our relationship is based upon a more settled and permanent basis than the nation of Israel could have ever known. That basis is Calvary. But we do sin, even as believers, and the Apostle John writes in his first letter, "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). We must, however, say that all men may have the forgiveness of sins through faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Let us consider now some of the details of this interesting chapter. The offerings brought by those who had sinned differed according to their position in the Jewish nation. There are four groups here:

- (1) the priest that was anointed;
- (2) the whole congregation;
- (3) a ruler;
- (4) one of the common people.

Substitution

Before dealing with the different offerings, let us think of what was done by all. Whoever brought his sin offering was to lay his hand upon its head and then kill it. This was a picture of a substitute bearing the sin that had been committed. To put this into New Testament terms, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). It is wonderful how the Bible stands together!

It was almost the same with a burnt offering. The vital difference is, however, that when it was a burnt offering the acceptability of the offering was transferred to the offerer. There, the word was, "It shall be accepted for him" (Lev. 1:4). When it was a sin offering, the sin of the offerer was transferred to the offering and the word was given, "It shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:26,31,35).

In those far distant times the forgiveness was temporary; in our day, because of a better offering at Calvary, it is eternal. Let no one minimise the greatness of this blessing. Even in the Old Testament, King David wrote, "Blessed (Happy) is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:1). As you read this today, do you know this valuable gift for yourself? "Whosoever believeth in Him (that is, Jesus) shall receive the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

A faultless offering

Let us look further in Leviticus 4. In each grade, without exception, it was vital that the offering be "without blemish." Each offering pointed to the Lord Jesus. It is important that we understand this. If this is not the case these pictures lose their value. Clear evidence is given in the New Testament as to the unblemished character and life of the Lord Jesus. We have the teaching of the apostles, that He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22), He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), "in Him was no sin" (1 John 3:5).

This witness came even from the most unexpected quarters. Pilate, the Roman Governor was compelled to say, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4; John 18:38; 19:4,6). At the very beginning of His life, the virgin birth bears its own witness of "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35). Only One who was sinless could bear the penalty our sins deserved and bring to us the forgiveness of sins.

The blood poured out

Let us consider now what was done with the blood of the sin offering. Toward the end of Leviticus 4 it is the case of one of the common people who had sinned. Listen to verse 27, "And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD which ought not to be done, and be guilty." How necessary was the blood. If a sin had been committed there was a price to be paid. The Bible says, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). Notice the word *guilty*. Every one comes under this summing

up. In the letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul brings all mankind under this heading, "guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). There was nothing we could do to help ourselves, but God has provided the answer. Listen to Leviticus 17 verse 11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul". Christians love to sing these words,

*"Of all the gifts Thy love bestows,
Thou Giver of all good,
Not heaven itself a richer knows
than the Redeemer's blood."*

How interesting the details are in our chapter. We have already considered what the person who brought the sacrifice had to do. He had to lay his hand upon the offering and kill it. His part was then done. It was then that the priest did his part and dealt with the blood. Forgiveness is not ours because of any thing we could do, therefore it was done by another. Just listen to what the priest did with the blood, "And the priest shall take of the blood thereof with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out all the blood thereof at the bottom of the altar" (Lev. 4:30). It has been thought that the horns of the altar speak of its strength. Sin had dishonoured God; the blood on the horns meant that divine justice was satisfied. However, the blood poured out was the means of forgiveness for the one who had sinned.

Someone may remember the terms used by Jesus when He instituted the Lord's Supper. It was in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, at the time of the Passover. The Lord Jesus had desired to keep this feast with His disciples before He suffered that awful death. After He had kept the Passover, He then gave them the instructions as to how they would remember Him when He was no longer with them. Let's just think for a moment of that wonderful occasion. It is in Luke 22, where we read: "And He took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19,20). Other translations of this Bible passage use the very same word as in Leviticus 4: "which is poured out for you". Jesus said it was for us! Can this be really true? It is true and we need to take it to heart. The Apostle John writes: "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Let us think again of the priest who had to do all that was necessary with the blood of the offering. It must have been an on-going task. As soon as one sacrifice had been offered, there would be another; his work was never finished. The trouble was that in the Old

Testament there was no permanent forgiveness; it was only temporary. The sacrifices had no real value, but they pointed forward to a better sacrifice, even Jesus, who would offer Himself and bring to people like us a permanent blessing.

Listen to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:11,12). This verse is about the Lord Jesus who offered Himself upon the cross of Calvary, giving His life as the better sacrifice we have already referred to. Because of this, as this verse says, He has for ever sat down. The expression "for ever" means *without interruption*. Almost the last words of Jesus from the cross were these, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Another verse from this same letter goes like this, "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin" (Heb. 10:26). There is no need for animal sacrifices now as they have been superseded by the one offering of the Lord Jesus. Of those of us who have received the Saviour into our hearts, these verses from the letter to the Hebrews go on to say: "For by one offering He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

The fat

There remains one other feature of the sin offering that was common to each grade of offering, whether it was for the priest who had sinned or one of the common people. This concerned the fat of the sacrifice. The fat was never to be eaten; it was all burnt for a sweet savour to God. The basis of this law was that the fat was the richest part of the animal and therefore belonged to God. Another interesting thing is that it is connected with the peace offering. The peace offering speaks of fellowship. It was after the priest had poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar that he dealt with the fat.

Listen to verse 31: "And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat is taken away from off the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour unto the LORD". Not only is the sin forgiven, but fellowship with God is restored. If we are thinking of a believer who has sinned, the fellowship he once enjoyed is marred. Earlier we referred to the work of the Lord Jesus as the Advocate. It is because of this that fellowship is restored. The same applies if it is an unbeliever trusting in Jesus for forgiveness; added to this forgiveness is fellowship with God the Father. Let us never forget that these gifts are because of God's love who gave His Son that they may become ours.

The priest's sacrifice

We are going to think now of the sacrifices that the anointed priest needed to bring when he had erred. He had privileges that the common people did not have. Much of his service was carried out in the holy place in the tabernacle. The blood of his sin offering was sprinkled seven times before the veil and some put upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense. These were in the area of his service. With God, privilege carries greater responsibility. This is equally true today! Also, a lamb or a goat was not great enough to deal with his sin; it had to be a bullock - a large offering indeed!

There is a very important difference here. Just listen to the instructions that were given in this case: "And the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and his legs, and his inwards, and his dung, even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt" (Lev. 4:11,12). The word "burn" in these two verses means *wholly consumed* and points to another aspect of the work that was done upon the cross. Sin had to be judged, and there was only One who could undertake such a work. Having completed the work, He rose from the dead. But it is true, He bore the judgement that sin deserved. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Only the Lord Jesus could do this! The mention of the ashes is evidence that nothing remains to be done.

It is also said that the animal was to be taken "outside the camp" to be consumed. In some other verses from Hebrews it says, "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). He was taken outside the gate of Jerusalem that had rejected Him. But there He sanctified the people by His own blood.

Another striking feature about the sin offering is that it is said to be "most holy". Believers have connected many of the psalms with the offerings. The psalm which is so relevant to our subject is the twenty-second. Let us just tune in, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Ps. 22:1-3). Note the words "Thou art holy." This is why we are told that the sin offering is most holy. You may remember that in Matthew and Mark the first verse of this psalm was actually repeated twice by our Saviour from the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). We believe

it was during the three hours of darkness that they were said. The apostle Peter puts it very simply in his first letter, "For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). This is the sin offering in a nut-shell.

As we come to the end of our study of the sin offering, pointing so clearly to the perfect life and the completed sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we must now ask, what is our response? In closing, listen to some words of a hymn by Isaac Watts.

*When we survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
Our richest gain we count but loss,
And pour contempt on all our pride.
Love so amazing so divine,
Demands our soul, our life, our all.*

May that be our response as we have thought about the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at Calvary.

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