

Hugo Bouter

An introduction to the Levitical offerings

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Leviticus 1-7

Two groups of two sacrifices

Among the Levitical sacrifices four main types can be distinguished: burnt offerings and grain offerings, peace offerings and sin offerings (Lev. 1-5). Scripture gives another classification of these in Psalm 40, which prophetically speaks of the coming of Christ and His work. He has fulfilled the law and He is the end of the law (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4).

His atoning work constitutes the full reality of the sacrifices brought under the old covenant. The four main types of sacrifices are described here as follows: sacrifice and (grain) offering, burnt offering and sin offering (Ps. 40:6). The New Testament uses the same arrangement, as Hebrews 10:5-9 refers to this and uses the same order. To portray the versatility of Christ's work, four different sacrifices were needed – just as four different gospels were needed to describe the glory of His Person.

The four main types can be divided into two groups of two sacrifices. The first two sacrifices were so-called "meal offerings," the last two "expiatory offerings," sacrifices that were necessary for the atonement. In the meal offerings, the Israelite gave up part of his food for the LORD and for the priests. The peace offering actually had the character of a common meal in that both the LORD and the priest, and the

Israelite himself participated in it. This offering is a picture of Christ's sacrifice as the foundation of a peaceful fellowship between God and His people, and also of the communion among ourselves as God's dear children. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

The grain offering was a sacrifice without blood and therefore it is a picture of Christ's perfect, devoted life to God as a Man here on earth. This ended in His sacrificial death, in which His devotedness to His God and Father culminated. According to the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament, a burnt offering was never brought without an accompanying grain offering. Similarly, the value of Christ's sacrificial death is founded on His pure humanity. It was this unique Man who has poured out His life into death; this gave His death a special value.

The other two sacrifices, burnt offerings and sin offerings, were offerings for atonement, respectively of the person and of the sins of the one who brought the offering. The burnt offering was offered entirely to God on the altar, and its sweet aroma went up to God. This sacrifice is a picture of Christ as the One who offered Himself wholly to God on the cross for a fragrant aroma (Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:14). In contrast, from the sin offerings exclusively all the fat was brought on the altar of burnt offering in the court of the tent of meeting.

God's holy wrath toward sin was expressed in the sacrificial laws by the prescription that the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the sanctuary, were to be burned entirely outside the camp. So Christ suffered in absolute loneliness, in the fire of God's judgment. The trespass offering was actually a special form of the sin offering; the issue here was how the relationship with God or the neighbor could be made good again, e.g., after property misappropriation. The consequences of the failure were redeemed by a trespass offering and the payment of ample compensation.

The connection with the psalms and the gospels

It is nice that the psalms in the Old Testament and the gospels in the New Testament also shed light on the Levitical sacrifices. The burnt offering aspect of Christ's work is put first in Psalm 40. He came with the special purpose of fulfilling the will of God. He wanted to glorify His God here on earth, where man's sin had dishonored God. To this end, He offered Himself willingly and completely: "I delight to do Your will, O My God, and your law is within My heart" (Ps. 40:8; Heb. 10:7).

We also find this side of Christ's work, that is, the burnt-offering aspect, in the gospel of John. The Father's will for Christ involved laying down His life, but He also had the power to fulfill this command and then take His life again (John 10:17-18). Thus our Lord accomplished God's will, glorified the Father here on earth, and finished the work He had given Him to do (John 13:31; 17:4; 19:30).

The sin offering aspect of Christ's work is mentioned in Psalm 40 (vv. 6-12), but it is more the subject of Psalm 22. There we see His sufferings when His God had to forsake Him in the three hours of darkness upon the cross. There He became the Sin-bearer, and God had to hide His holy face from Him (Ps. 22:1-2). Christ was made sin for us, and He experienced the sinner's death. God then laid Him in the dust of death, before He received God's answer to all His sufferings in His glorious resurrection (Ps. 22:15-18).

In Psalm 22 verse 22, the great turn takes place. The second main part of the psalm describes the glorious results of the work of redemption (Ps. 22:22-31). We see the rich blessings for (a) the church, (b) for the people of Israel, and (c) for the nations in the coming Kingdom. Christ now dwells in the midst of the redeemed, calling them His brethren; and He raises the hymn of praise to God. He declares the Father's name to His own. This is the special privilege of the church, gathered from the Jews and from the nations at the time of Christ's rejection (Ps. 22:22; John 20:17; Heb. 2:12).

Psalm 69 highlights the trespass offering aspect of Christ's work: "Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it (....). My sins are not hidden from You" (Ps. 69:4-5). But it was a strange guilt He bore, the guilt of the many for whom He made His soul an offering for sin (cf. Isa. 53:10).

Psalm 85 can be connected with the peace offering. For God speaks peace to His people and to His saints, because all His desires have been fulfilled: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10-13). However, Psalm 118 is also considered the psalm of the peace offering. Here we see the peaceful fellowship between God and His people in the day which the LORD has made.

Psalm 16 is especially the psalm of the grain offering. Here we find Christ's pure humanity and His perfect devotedness to His God and Father. This subject is accentuated in the New Testament in the gospel of Luke. The gospel of Mark corresponds to the sin offering, the gospel of Matthew more to the trespass offering. Thus we see that the Scriptures are one, and bear witness to the wonderful Person of our Lord and Savior and to the work He has accomplished on Calvary's cross (John 5:39). The sacrifices of the book of Leviticus are a favorite

subject, and certainly in the English-speaking world there is plenty of literature available for study.¹



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Notes on the Pentateuch by C.H. Mackintosh; The Offerings of Leviticus by W. Kelly; The Levitical Offerings by H.A. Ironside.