

## **The Burnt Offering**

Leviticus 1:3-17; 6:8-13

### I. Exposition

- A. “Burnt Offering” is the Hebrew term **עֹלָה**, ‘*olah*, which means “that which goes up.”
- a) It pictured the smoke of the sacrifice which went up in into heaven.
  2. It is also referred to as a “whole burnt offering” or a “holocaust offering” because it was the only sacrifice which belonged completely to God. The entire sacrifice (except for the hide; cf. 7:8) was burned up on the altar. None of it was consumed by the priest or the worshipper (1:9, 13, 17).
- B. The burnt offering initiates the list of sacrifices, revealing its significance. It was not usually the first sacrifice presented by the worshipper, but it was the most common sacrifice offered by Israel.
1. It was part of the national sacrifices offered daily (Num 28:3-8), weekly (Num 28:9-10), and monthly (Num 28:11-15).
  2. It was offered at every Israelite feast except for the Day of Atonement (Lev 23; Num 28-29).
  3. Its history can be traced back to the sacrifices of Noah (Gen 8:20), Job (Job 1:5), Abraham (Gen 22:2f).
- C. Elements of the Burnt Offering
1. The burnt offering could be an animal from the herd (1:3-9), the flock (1:10-13), or a bird (1:14-17).
  2. The details of the burnt offering are included in 1:3-9 in discussion of offerings from the herd, but they apply equally to the flock. Only with offerings of birds do the details vary.
  3. The order of these offerings descend from the most to the least expensive. This enabled every Israelite, regardless of socio-economic status, to present a burnt offering.
  4. Even so, the historical and biblical data suggests that sheep and goats were the most common animals offered. Birds were reserved only for the very poorest of the nation.
  5. Interestingly, these categories of animals are all present in the covenant ceremony ratifying the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15).
  6. Regardless of the type, the animal must be “flawless” (1:3, 10), meaning that there must be no physical defect. God expected the worshipper to offer his very best in sacrifice. If the animal was a bull, sheep, or goat, it must be a male.
- D. Presentation of the Offering
1. The worshipper and the priest were both heavily involved in the process.

2. Bulls, sheep, and goats were brought by the worshipper to the entrance of the Meeting Tent where they were inspected by the priest “for its acceptance before Yahweh” (1:3). This ensured that the animal was of requisite quality and thus could “make atonement on his behalf” (1:4).
3. The worshipper placed his hand on the head of the animal, signifying his identification with the animal as his substitute (1:4).
4. He then slaughtered the animal and the priest collected the blood in a basin and splashed it against the sides of the altar (1:5, 11).
5. Next, the worshipper skinned the animal, quartered it, and dressed out the animal, washing its entrails and its legs with water (1:6, 9, 12, 13).
6. Finally, he presented the parts to the priest, who arranged all of them on the altar to be entirely consumed by the fire (1:8-9, 12-13).
7. For birds, the process varied in that the priest alone manipulating the animal’s body. He pinched off its head, drained the blood, removed the entrails, and tore the bird apart (without dividing it completely), and placed it on the altar to be consumed.

#### E. Special Details

1. The burnt offering could not be removed from the altar until the morning (6:8a).
2. The priest disposed of the ashes by taking them to a designated location outside the camp (6:10-11).
3. The priest was responsible to maintain the fire on the altar at all times (6:8b, 12-13). This meant that provision for atonement would always be available for people.
4. The priest maintained the holiness of his position through the appropriate use of priestly garments. He wore special garments when presenting the offerings on the altar, but removed them when disposing of the ashes outside the camp (6:10-11).

#### F. Purpose of the burnt offering

1. Atonement
  - a) “The main purpose of the sacrifice is atonement. Through provision of a sacrifice, sin and defilement are purged so that the offerer once again can enjoy communion with the holy LORD God” (Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 86).
  - b) “An acceptable animal meant that Yahweh received the animal as expiation for the offerer’s sinful disposition. Finding atonement through his offering, a person might approach the presence of the Holy God with confidence. He was free to present other offerings” (Hartley, 24).
  - c) The sacrifice was viewed as the worshipper’s substitute. Placing his hand on the animal depicted (1) his identification with the animal, and (2) the transference of his guilt to it. If God accepted the offering, it indicated that he had accepted the worshipper.

## The Burnt Offering

- d) The death and subsequent offering of blood on the altar provided atonement for the worshipper and enabled him to be acceptable.
- e) “As the ritual began, the worshipper pressed (*samak*) on the animal’s head with the hand and held it while he slit the throat.... This dramatic act was an emotional experience—the animal died at the hand of the offerer, crumpled to the ground at the offerer’s feet. Perceptive worshipers knew, as later revelation confirmed, that it should have been their blood that was shed and their bodies that lay lifeless before the altar” (Ross, 91).
- f) “In Gen. 8:21 God’s attitude to man is reversed by the burnt offering. Instead of a flood there is a promise that the harvests will not fail, and a covenant is made with future generations that the earth will never again be destroyed by a universal flood. Thus the burnt offering does not remove sin or change man’s sinful nature, but it makes fellowship between sinful man and a holy God possible. It propitiates God’s wrath against sin” (Wenham, 57).
- g) The atonement made by the offering was more general than the sin and guilt offerings, which were made under the burden of sin and were intended to atone for specific sins or impurities.
- h) The burnt offering pictured the *general* removal of sin and impurity through the offering of blood, enabling the worshipper to have fellowship with God.

### 2. Acceptance

- a) Additionally, the complete consumption of the animal on the altar, whose smoke ascended upward as a “pleasing aroma to Yahweh,” pictured the complete acceptance of the worshipper, who had been cleansed through blood atonement and thus had found favor and fellowship with God.
- b) “The desired result of the burnt offering was that it ‘be acceptable to the LORD.’ The use of the noun *rāṣôn*, ‘acceptable,’ is cognate to the verb *rāṣâ*, ‘be pleased with, accept favorably’ .... The sacrificial offering was thus to elicit favor from God” (Rooker, 86).
- c) “The sacrifice signified the complete surrender of the worshipper to God; the burning with fire signified God’s full acceptance” (Ross, 89).
- d) Thus, the burnt offering provided a means of maintaining man’s fellowship with God, purifying the worshipper and allowing him to enter God’s presence in peace.

### 3. Dedication

- a) The costliness of the sacrifice (a flawless male animal) and the fact that the entire was given to Yahweh pictured the worshipper’s complete devotion and dedication to God.
- b) The burnt offering was often given as an expression of the worshipper’s faith in God, his desire to please God, and his willingness to obey God’s commandments.

- c) 1 Samuel 15:22, along with Psalms 40:6-8 and 50:7-23 emphasize the requirement of obedience and loyalty as God's primary concern. Without a heart of thankfulness, dedication, and obedience to Yahweh as the good and sovereign God, burnt offerings are empty rituals and ineffectual for the offerer.
- d) "Gen. 22 tells how Abraham was told to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. In the biblical story this forms the supreme test of Abraham's faith in God's promise.... As the story indicates, he obeyed and at the critical moment his son was saved and his own faith was vindicated. This is the main theological thrust of the story. Yet the exegete may ask why a burnt offering was the chosen means to test Abraham's obedience. Other ways of verifying Abraham's devotion could be suggested. Perhaps the burnt offering was chosen because it was a service in which the worshipper bore witness to his faith in God and his willingness of obey his commandments" (Wenham, 58).
- e) This aspect of the burnt offering is underscored by the fact that votive and freewill offerings were often given as burnt offerings (Lev 22:17-20). "If affirmation of faith and obedience are underlying motives for bringing a burnt offering, it is very appropriate that it should be offered as a thanksgiving for deliverance, as a freewill offering, or when a vow was fulfilled (Num. 6:14; 15:3; Ps. 50; 66:13-15). The worshipper has proved God's faithfulness in his life and wishes now to express his faith publicly" (Wenham, 58).
- f) "It signified both complete surrender to God by the offerer and complete acceptance by God of the worshiper who brought it" (Ross, 85).

## II. The Burnt Offering and the New Covenant

### A. Relationship to Christ

The burnt offering is only mentioned 2x explicitly in the NT, both times in quotations from the OT (Mark 12:33; Heb 10:6-8). But the language and concepts connected with the burnt offering are used to describe the death of Christ.

- 1. Christ was a male without defect (1 Pet 1:19)
- 2. Christ's death paid the ransom price for sinners (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 1 Tim 2:5-6).
- 3. Christ's death satisfied the wrath of God for sin (Rom 3:25)
- 4. Christ's death on the cross was foreshadowed by Isaac's sacrifice as a burnt offering. There is dual emphasis on both Isaac and Jesus as only sons and on Abraham's and God's willingness to offer them (Gen 22:2, 15-17; John 3:16; Rom 8:32).
- 5. Christ's death fulfilled the intent of the burnt offering
  - a) Christ's desire was to please God (Ps 40:6-8; Heb 10:6-8)

The original context of the psalm speaks of David, who expresses his dedication to Yahweh and his desire to do God's will. He looks to the law of God, which contains the commandments which God wants him to obey. Hebrews highlights

## The Burnt Offering

the perfect obedience of Christ as the necessary ingredient that made his sacrifice superior to those of the old covenant.

- b) Christ was the one who did what God really wanted (John 6:38; 4:34; 5:30)
  - c) Christ was well-pleasing to God (Mark 1:10-11; cf. Matt 3:17; Mark 8:7; Luke 3:22).
  - d) Christ's death was a soothing aroma to God (Eph 5:1-2).
6. Christ's sacrifice is superior to the burnt offering sacrifice
- a) Christ offered a once-for-all final sacrifice for sin (Heb 10:10-12)
  - b) Christ's death was sufficient to completely cleanse from sin (Heb 10:1-4, 14; 1 John 1:7)

### B. Applications for Christian

1. The burnt offering teaches us about what the sacrifice of Christ accomplished
2. The burnt offering reminds us of sin's cost and God's grace
  - a) The OT worshiper had to bring or buy an animal to sacrifice—animals cost money.
  - b) The OT worshiper had to press his hand upon the animal and slit its throat—he was reminded that his sin cost the animal its life.
  - c) Nevertheless, the graduated level of animal offerings graciously allowed every OT Israelite to offer a burnt offering. *Everyone* could receive atonement and acceptance before Yahweh.
  - d) “The worshiper might well feel very much deprived when he had paid for a choice lamb to be sacrificed. But it reminded him that the animal was a ransom, a substitute payment instead of his own life. ‘For the wages of sin is death. God in his mercy provided a cheap alternative in OT times—a lamb. In NT times a free pardon is available. ‘The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom 6:23)” (Wenham, 65).
3. The burnt offering reminds us of our need for daily cleansing from remaining sin
  - a) Burnt offerings were offered morning and evening.
  - b) This reminds us of the reality that we are daily tainted by the stain of remaining sin are in need of continual cleansing through confession and repentance (1 John 1:7-9).
4. The burnt offering teaches us the requirements for acceptable worship
  - a) Forgiveness is the prerequisite for acceptable worship
    - (1) Burnt offerings were offered every morning—they initiated every day of life

- (2) They were also offered as worshipers approached God to worship and fellowship with him.
  - (3) “The pattern of OT sacrifices may thus provide a pattern of truly Christian worship. Worship should begin with confession of sins, a claiming of Christ’s forgiveness, and a total rededication to God’s service, before going on to praise and petition” (Wenham, 66).
- b) Acceptable worship is costly
- (1) It cost the OT believer something to worship—his time, energy, and money. This was an integral part of OT worship.
  - (2) Worship that costs nothing does not reflect a understanding. The worshiper who understands God’s grace and goodness will desire to respond in a way which expresses his acknowledgement of what he has received (2 Sam 24:24).
- c) The NT believer offers worship to God in a life completely devoted to God.
5. The burnt offering teaches us about true devotion to God
- a) The OT believer expressed his faith and devotion through animal sacrifice The NT believer expresses his faith and devotion through spiritual sacrifice
    - (1) Life as a living, spiritual sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:5)
  - b) Praise, thanksgiving, service, and giving as sacrifice (Heb 13:15-16; Phil 4:18)