

# Offering a Sweet Aroma to God

Devotional Reading: Romans 12:1-8

Background Scripture: Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13

Today's Scripture: Leviticus 1:3-17

## I. An Offering from the Herd Leviticus 1:3-9

<sup>3</sup> “If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you. <sup>5</sup> You are to slaughter the young bull before the LORD, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and splash it against the sides of the altar at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>6</sup> You are to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup> Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the wood that is burning on the altar. <sup>9</sup> You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

3a. In the verse just before this one, the Lord permitted that animal sacrifices could come from either a person's herd (of cattle) or flock (of sheep and goats). The verse before us narrows the focus

specifically to that of a *burnt offering* that comes from *the herd*.

3b. The burnt offering could not be presented just anywhere the giver desired. The worshipper had to bring it to the place specifically designated for such a sacred purpose: the tabernacle. Only then would the sacrifice be considered acceptable to the Lord, what conforms to his requirements, and what pleases him. The Lord was to be worshipped on his terms and at the sole place designated for that purpose. He instituted strict penalties for performing sacrifices in any other location. Deuteronomy 12:11-14 reiterates the necessity of a centralized worship site, anticipating the future temple in Jerusalem. This requirement forced the Israelites to worship the Lord alone in a consistent way and prevented them from continuing their practices of sacrificing to “goat idols” (Leviticus 17:5-7).

4. As the reader works through the procedure specified for the various types of sacrifices, several similarities are seen. The first is the instruction to put a *hand on the head of the burnt offering*. This is the first of a multistep procedure. The placement of the hand symbolizes the person's submission of the animal as a sacrifice on the person's behalf. Commentary on Leviticus 1:9, below, summarizes the entirety of the steps.

5. As the procedure continues to the following steps, we may wonder who did the hands-on work to *slaughter the young bull*. The context implies that it was the one who had brought the animal to be sacrificed; after that, *Aaron's sons the priests* (ordained in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8), took over to perform the rest of the tasks regarding *blood*. But Leviticus 14:19-20 mentions a priest who was to slaughter the animal. In any case, a priest had to be present to officiate.

The use of blood, as described, functions as a mechanism of purification. It reinforced the principle of atonement since, as the Lord later declared, "The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11).

6. The next step was the removal of the animal's hide. This might be either prior to or simultaneous with cutting the carcass *into pieces*. Both would speed up the burning process. Leviticus 7:8 directed that the priest officiating at the burnt offering should receive the animal's hide.

7. Only priests were allowed to carry out the act of sacrificing the animal prepared for the burnt offering. The phrase *put fire on the altar* does not mean "to start the fire," because the fire for this altar was to burn continuously. The idea, instead, is to stoke the fire.

8. Exodus 29:13 and Leviticus 8:20; 9:13 specify *the pieces* in greater detail.

9. This verse concludes the description of the ritual that began in Leviticus 1:4, above. The resulting smoke that creates *an aroma pleasing to the Lord* attributes a human characteristic—a sense of smell—to God. This is anthropomorphic language. Even though God is spirit, the Scriptures speak of him as having physical characteristics. Here, the sense of

smell depicts how the Lord was pleased with the burnt offering as presented in the manner set forth in the text.

To summarize, the ritual involved these steps:

1. Place hand on the animal's head
2. Slay the animal
3. Splash animal blood against the sides of the altar
4. Remove the hide from the carcass
5. Dismember the carcass
6. Stoke the altar fire
7. Arrange wood on the altar
8. Arrange body pieces and fat on the altar fire
9. Wash internal organs and legs
10. Burn all except hide to create smoke pleasing to the Lord

## II. An Offering from the Flock

### Leviticus 1:10-13

<sup>10</sup> "If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, you are to offer a male without defect. <sup>11</sup> You are to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall splash its blood against the sides of the altar. <sup>12</sup> You are to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the wood that is burning on the altar. <sup>13</sup> You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of them and burn them on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

10. For this kind of offering, *sheep or goats* that were *male without defect* were interchangeable with a young bull, as just discussed. We see male goats and sheep themselves as interchangeable for Passover in Exodus 12:5. Either goats or sheep were acceptable for fellowship offerings, with either male or female allowed. Either bulls, male or female goats, or female lambs are allowed for sin

or trespass offerings, depending on the nature of the sin.

11. Here a specific instruction was given as to where the animal was to be slain: *at the north side of the altar*. Why this was required is not entirely clear, although it may have something to do with the fact that the tabernacle and the gateway into its courtyard faced east. This rationale may also combine in some way with a need to distinguish this offering from the one taken from the herd; other than that, the procedure at this point is the same.

12. Again, the procedure is the same as that designated for the bovines.

13. Yet again, the procedure is the same as with the bull.

### III. An Offering of Birds

#### Leviticus 1:14-17

<sup>14</sup> "If the offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, you are to offer a dove or a young pigeon. <sup>15</sup> The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup> He is to remove the crop and the feathers and throw them down east of the altar where the ashes are. <sup>17</sup> He shall tear it open by the wings, not dividing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is burning on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

14. This option for a *burnt offering* was provided for people who could not afford to bring the aforementioned offerings from a herd or flock. Such an option was also provided for women after childbirth who could not afford to offer a lamb for the burnt offering of purification. One may recall the sacrifice that Joseph and Mary offered following the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:24).

15. The procedure for offering a bird as a burnt offering differed from that prescribed for offerings from the herd or the flock. Whereas the blood of the animals that were sacrificed was sprinkled around the altar of burnt offering, the bird's blood was to be *drained out on the side of the altar*. Though the bird's blood would not be nearly as abundant as that of the other animals, the need to separate its blood from its body must be completed. Israelites were forbidden to eat blood.

16. The meaning of a bird's *crop* is uncertain. It may refer to the pouch near the gullet or throat (the craw) where the bird stores food temporarily before digestion. Another option is that it may refer to the lower intestines. Its removal may be compared to removing the intestines from the animals of the herd or the flock.

The place of *ashes* that was beside *the altar* seems to have been a temporary location for ashes; the ultimate destination for that refuse was outside the camp.

17. Further instructions regarding the sacrifices of birds conclude this portion of our text. The anatomy of a bird is quite different from that of sheep/goats and bovines, thus the sacrificial procedure was quite different. *The priest* was solely responsible for preparing and presenting the bird as a burnt offering. Though not as monetarily valuable as something offered from the flock or the herd, this offering still produced *an aroma pleasing to the Lord*.

As followers of Jesus, our duty is to offer to God, not burnt sacrifices of animals or birds, but our lives as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). Our sacrifices do include the monetary but are primarily spiritual (1 Peter 2:5), consisting of "the fruit of lips" offering our thanks to God (Hebrews 13:15) and the good deeds we do as salt and light in our spheres of influence (Matthew 5:13-14).

# Involvement Learning

## Offering a Sweet Aroma to God

### Into the Lesson

Why are ceremonies important?

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Why are ceremonies not important?

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Worship in the tabernacle was bound up in symbolism and ceremony. Let's see how and why.

### Key Verse

You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, you are to offer a male without defect.  
—Leviticus 1:9-10

### Into the Word

Answer these true/false questions. Check your answers by reading Leviticus 1:3-17.

1. A "burnt offering" is the same as a "sin offering." T/F.
2. In offerings, animals were burned alive. T/F.
3. Eating the blood of the sacrifice was forbidden. T/F.
4. The sacrificial animal had to be unblemished. T/F.
5. Goats could not be burnt offerings. T/F.

Comparing the features of the burnt offering with the following offerings:

The grain offering (Leviticus 2).

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The fellowship offering (Leviticus 3).

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The sin offering (4:1-5:13).

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The guilt offering (5:14-6:7).

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### Into Life

1 2 3 4 5  
*Never* *Always*

Rate yourself on the above scale for each one by writing a number next to the letter.

1. I am actively sacrificing myself to God. \_\_\_\_
2. My offerings to the Lord are heartfelt, representing my best. \_\_\_\_
3. I think more about what I can give to God than what I want to get from him. \_\_\_\_

What experiences have you had with the concept of an accountability partner?

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Who will be an accountability partner for you in light of the challenges of today's text?

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### Thought to Remember

Always worship God on his terms,  
not ours.