



## **The Five Levitical Offerings (Reflections on their order)**

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- Their order in regard to the people
- Their order in regard to the priests
- Their order seen in the Roman Epistle

## The Book of Leviticus

When we respond to such matters it is important to bear in mind the biblical background relating to them. As we have noted elsewhere, the first five books of the OT follow a prescribed order. In Genesis we have Israel's national election and promise; in Exodus we have the nation's redemption and precepts; in Leviticus its consecration and pattern in priesthood are given; in Numbers we have its enumeration and pilgrimage and in Deuteronomy its revision and pledge. The principal thing to notice here is that the various offerings in Leviticus are to do with a divinely elected and redeemed people – the Israelites. They are a covenant people who had been redeemed *by* God through *sacrifice* and, who, on the *ground* of that sacrifice are *now* to have access *to* God. This access – as with the redeemed of God in all ages, must be according to the mind and will of God. And so we have in Leviticus for the dispensation in which God is dealing with His covenanted and redeemed people, all the divine instructions that are needed for their access to Him. The five “Levitical offerings” were a vital part of the provisions and principles upon which that access was to take place. In Chapters 1-7 these five offerings are seen to have two orders. The first we may identify as the order of **institution** and the second the order of **implementation**.

### The place where the offerings were instituted

The physical location of divine revelation in Scripture is always instructive. The institution of the offerings is not upon Mount Sinai where God set out the divine commandments instructing the nation regarding its moral responsibilities before Him and unto man. It is now God speaking from within His ordained house – the place of His *dwelling among* His people. “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may  **dwell** among them” (Ex 25:8 cf Ex 29:45; 29:46). This has always been the desire of God. To deliver His oppressed people - “and I am come down to **deliver** them,” and then dwell among them (Ex 3:8). Accordingly, we see that “the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Lev 1:1). This occasion is a marked sequel to that which took place on the Mount. It is God instructing the nation, but now about the way of *approach* to Him. He was to dwell among them – not simply be present with them as He was in earlier days. There was now to be a special relationship between God and His covenant and redeemed nation – Israel.

This relationship had to be according to righteousness, because righteousness was the ground upon which it was established. And so we have God declaring the way of approach to Him from within the holy place and setting out principles upon which that righteous relationship can be maintained. May we lay hold on this unchangeable principle – it is God, and not man setting out the way of approach to God. These divine principles have not changed. The approach to God today by the redeemed is also according to righteousness. It is not now through sacrifices and offerings that we approach God in worship and service, but through the once for all sacrificial work of Christ, our Great High Priest and Advocate. In the former we have Christ bearing our spiritual infirmities and so enabling our communion with God. In the latter He restores our fellowship with the Father, which can be marred by unrighteousness due to sins that we commit. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1). In this, we have a remarkable parallel yet contrast between the repeated offerings required from the children of Israel with the new and living way into the holiest that we possess through the one, all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ.

## The order of offerings in their Institution

We have in the first instance the *institution* of the five offerings and then their *implementation* which we have in the second ordering.<sup>1</sup> The institution of the offerings must be first given to the **people** and done so as **God** sees the offerings according to **His** purposes. These purposes are in Christ and therefore their institution particularly reflects Christ in His Person and work. In all things He must have the preeminence that God may be all in all (Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15:28). We have, in the very place where these offerings were to be administered – the Tabernacle or the house of God, another example of Christ as preeminent before God and His people. There, the Ark of the Covenant which speaks so wondrously of Christ, is not only the first mentioned in the institution of the house, but the sacred object from which everything else within it takes its divinely appointed place and measure.

The offerings in Leviticus 1-6:7 are grouped as follows.

- Burnt offering
- Meal offering
- Peace offering
- Sin offering
- Trespass offering

They are grouped into two categories according to their purpose and place of offering. The first three were known as “sweet savour” offerings (or “ascending offerings”). When they were offered by fire, their ascending fragrance brought delight to God. They were also voluntary. The remaining two offerings were compulsory and not of a sweet or ascending savour to God. This is because they essentially dealt with sin.

**Sweet Savor & Voluntary** – on the brazen altar inside the Tabernacle gate.

- Burnt offering
- Meal offering
- Peace offering

**Not sweet-savor & Mandatory** – slain where the burnt offering was slain but burned outside the camp.

- Sin offering
- Trespass offering

Returning now to the order of institution. We said that this order was given to the people and it reflects God’s purposes in Christ. Accordingly they can be outlined as follows:

- Burnt offering            The immeasurable *consecration* of Christ
- Meal offering            The impeccable *character* of Christ
- Peace offering           The inexpressible *communion* of Christ
- Sin offering              The inviolable *condemnation* and *forgiveness* of sin by Christ
- Trespass offering        The inestimable *cleansing* of sins through Christ

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction is seen also between the “Instituted Passover” and the “Commemorative Passover, as well as in the institution of the Lord’s Supper before Pentecost and its implementation after Pentecost.

The sweet savour offerings come first reflecting of what Christ is to God. We then have the compulsory and non-sweet offerings, indicating what Christ became by divine mandate to vindicate God and provide forgiveness of sins. “For He hath made him to be sin for us [the non-sweet savour offerings], who knew no sin [the sweet savour offerings]; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21).

## **The order of offerings in their Implementation**

The second order is supplementary and differs only in relation to the position of the Peace offering which now is placed last.

- Burnt offering
- Meal offering
- Sin offering
- Trespass offering
- Peace offering

In this second order which begins in Leviticus 6:8, emphasis is upon the **priestly** aspect of the offerings (v 9). Priestly service begins with an appreciation of what Christ is to God, it then feeds on Christ and acknowledges what a redeemed man is before God – a saved sinner, producing a sweet savour of grateful praise to God and blessed communion with Him.

It is here in the implementation of the offerings – the “law of the offerings,” that we get the principle of “eating” brought in. Eating of the burnt offering however was prohibited as was partaking of the fat and the blood, because they were reserved for God. Apart from Leviticus 3:17, eating is not mentioned until after 6:8. The practical lesson for us is that priestly service can only be enjoyed and administered when we, as priests unto God, have an experimental appreciation of Christ as seen in the offerings. This is signified by the eating and, in the case of the Burnt offering, that which remained – the skin, the priest’s portion. We say more on this later.

## **The five offerings seen in the Epistle to the Romans** (the perishing sinner to priestly saint)

We have observed on another occasions the order of these offerings seen in the Epistle to the Romans.

|                 |                       |  |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Chapters 1-2:   | The Trespass offering | - “What hast thou done?”                                 |
| Chapter 3:      | The Sin offering      | - “Where art thou?”                                      |
| Chapter 5:1:    | The Peace offering    | - Peace with God   |
| Chapters 6 & 7: | The Meal offering     | - “dead to sin,” walk in the newness of life.            |
| Chapter 12:     | The Burnt offering    | - “dead to the law,” serve in the newness of the Spirit. |

The Roman Epistle begins where the sinner must begin – with the realization that he or she is a trespasser before God and that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). It is to do with what I, as a sinner before God have done and my place of separation from Him because of sin. Upon my realization of sin and guilt before God, I turn by faith to Christ as my Redeemer. My conversion brings peace with God. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Then, in Romans chapters 6 and 7, I learn what it is to be justified before God in my life and walk as one dead to sin and dead to the law. “Likewise reckon ye

also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4). I have a new Master and a new Husband. Chapter 12 then brings me to the point to which I, as a *redeemed* sinner must come – the Burnt offering. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). Having come to this juncture, the saved sinner is positioned not only to gain blessed insights into the sweet savour offerings as they relate to Christ, but also to discharge their priestly service in the light of it – to walk in the newness of life and to serve in the newness of the Spirit. It is correctly noted, that unlike Peter, Paul does not speak of the believer as a priest; but does he not here present the believer’s *preparation* for priesthood?

| ROMANS                                     | LEVITICUS 6.9 etc  |
|--|--|
| The perishing sinner to the priestly saint | For priestly service among the redeemed (implementation) |
| Trespass                                   | Burnt  |
| Sin  | Meal   |
| Peace                                      | Sin  |
| Meal                                       | Trespass   |
| Burnt                                      | Peace  |

When we exercise our priesthood we must begin with an appreciation of what Christ is to God – the burnt offering. I must come as a sinner and by the sin offering. But after I have come it is for priestly service, which is to be exercised on the basis of the infinite glory – the sweet savour that Christ brought to a holy God through His Person and work for sin. It is what Christ did voluntarily to glorify God on account of sin that is in view here – not what He did for me in regard to sin, precious though that is. There I get the sin offering – Christ made sin that I might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21 cf Isa 53:10). The burnt offering on the other hand typifies Christ voluntarily *glorifying* God because of what was *brought out* by the fire, Christ’s perfection and complete devotedness to God, occasioned by sin. The *whole* sacrifice, representing complete devotion is burnt on the altar, which bears its name and from which ascends a sweet savour unto God – wholly acceptable to Him.<sup>2</sup> It spoke of the acceptance of the *person* “who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God” (Heb 9:14). The sin offering however is to do with Christ *vindicating* God because of what Christ *did* – that which was *put away* (consumed) by the fire - sin.<sup>3</sup> It was mandatory and of a sweet savour, for He who knew no sin was made sin. “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp” (Heb 13:11).

<sup>2</sup> This altar is known as “the altar”; the “altar of burnt offering” and the “altar by the door of the Tabernacle.” It is commonly referred to as the “brazen altar.”

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew grammar beautifully brings this out. When the burnt offering is in view the Hebrew word *qatar* (*kahtar*) is used, which is the word used for the burning of incense (i.e., Lev 1:9), the thought being of a fragrance produced by fire. This Hebrew word was not employed for the burning of the sin offering. For instance, in Leviticus 4:12 the sacrifice for sin (cf its fat which was to be a burnt offering) was to be burnt outside the camp. The Hebrew word here is *saraph*, which means to set on fire and be consumed.

And so, it is the “holocaust” offering that is first before us as priests because it is the first in our approach to God as priests. Here we enter into the grand truth, that Christ as the ascending sweet savour is the Beloved of God, and that we are presented as redeemed priests unto God in the good of it. We are “accepted in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:6-7). Christ presented Himself as the burnt offering for acceptance on account of sin. Because of Christ’s acceptance, we are accepted and can approach God. “And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him” (Lev 1:4). It is a blessed truth, confirming our standing in Christ before God. The meal offering we know was closely associated with the burnt offering, being offered as a gift offering along with it (Lev 9:17). Accordingly, we are given that practical exhortation associated with Hebrews 9:14. Because He offered Himself up to God without spot, we are exhorted to purge our consciences “from dead works to serve the living God.” The purity indicated by the burnt and meal offerings, which were a sweet savour unto God sanctifies us in our priestly service. We exercise our priesthood in the newness of life and in the newness of the Spirit. We do this by feeding upon the priest’s portion of the meal offering – Christ seen in the mingled fine flour, oil and frankincense. But what if we should fail and falter in our approach to God? It is not now restoration through the sacrifices of old, but the one all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, our Great High Priest, “not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). Finally, we come to the peace offering. It was to be a sacrifice and an offering by fire with the blood sprinkled upon the altar. There was a portion set aside for the priest to eat – the breast and the right shoulder. As we partake of the breast and the right shoulder as priests, we learn something of the strength of divine love in the death of Christ: that “the chastisement of our peace was upon him” (Isa 53:5). They speak of Christ in His love through death, “for He is our peace” (Eph 2:14). “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death...Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned” (Songs 8:6-7).

Of interest and worthy of a concluding remark, is that this priestly order is given *after* the order given by God to the people, but *before* the priestly investiture in Chapter 8. The order in Leviticus is instructive – the institution of the offerings, their priestly implementation and then the investiture of the priests. The investiture of the priests – that is, their *personal* sanctification in service to God, was to be accomplished by the offerings. They entered their priestly service by them. So we have the offerings determining the manner in which they were to *exercise* their priestly service as well as the means by which they were to *enter* into it. They were also the standard by which they were *examined* in their service as priests – as noted by the divine judgment visited upon Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron who offered up strange fires to God (Lev 10:1). In all this we have a blessed parallel in our priestly position and service in Christ.