

Beginning your Relationship with God

The Burnt Offering

Leviticus 1:1 The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting (testimony; LXX), saying...

² "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of live-stock from the herd or from the flock.

³ "If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.

⁴ He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

⁵ Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

⁶ Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,

⁷ and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.

⁸ And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar;

⁹ but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

¹⁰ "If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish,

¹¹ and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar.

¹² And he shall cut it into pieces, with its head and its fat, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar,

¹³ but the entrails and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

¹⁴ "If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or pigeons.

¹⁵ And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar.

¹⁶ He shall remove its crop with its contents and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes.

¹⁷ He shall tear it open by its wings, but shall not sever it completely. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD."

(Lev 1:1-17)

A Sweet Sound in Your Ear

“I Love You, Lord” is a short little worship song written in 1974 by **Laurie Brendemuehl**. She tells the story of its origin:

It was a dark time in my life. We had no extra money, no friends nearby, no church home, and my husband was busy all of the time with his studies. I didn't drive, so I couldn't get away. We lived on a highway in a mobile home, so I couldn't even put the baby in a stroller and go for a walk. Our only neighbors were

people long retired and tired of life. When I needed some encouragement there was no extra money for long distance calls to family or friends. I was lonely. The only thing I was committed to was trying to get up each morning before our baby, then a toddler, and spend some time with Jesus. I knew that was where the “life” was.

The day the song came, I had gotten up early and was sitting with my Bible and my guitar. I realized that I didn’t have anything in me to sing to Jesus. I just didn’t have anything in me to offer Him. I was so empty. So, I prayed and said to the Lord, “If you want to hear me sing, would you give me something that you would like to hear?”¹

The lyrics are:

*I love you, Lord
And I lift my voice
Worship you
Oh, my soul rejoice!
Take joy my King
In what You hear
Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear*

¹ Lindsay Terry, “Story Behind the Song: ‘I Love You Lord,’” *The St. Augustine Record* (Feb 5, 2015), <https://www.staugustine.com/article/20150205/lifestyle/302059930>.

The tune that came to her is a beautiful little thing, and it fits the lyrics nicely. And those lyrics are quite lovely, so long as it's not sung too many times in a row.

But that's not the way of modern worship. I grew up hearing this song week after week in church and youth groups where it became the definition of the not-so-nice pejorative “7-11” choruses—seven words sung eleven times. While there is a place for short songs of worship in God's word (**Ex 15:21** or **Ps 117** for instance), and we Reformed people can often knee-jerk react against this point, nevertheless, to sing a song like this that much comes close to vain repetition, gutting its intended meaning and **trivializing the message**.

There is something about modern Evangelical worship that the abuse of this song exemplifies. Evangelicals do not have a good history in approaching God. From its early marriage with Fundamentalism that saw Evangelicals lose the ability to explain their still-in-tact, albeit often truncated liturgies that they had inherited from earlier Protestantism which in turn ended up with a couple of generations of church-goers having no idea why they were doing what they were doing, and so the whole experience started to feel

legalistic; to its invention of the Seeker Movement where out-and-out unbelievers began to have significant impact on how things like “praise and worship” were done; to its embrace of a kind of **sentimental** Christianity that 7-11 abuses exemplify where it is more about the feeling you get, which has in turn morphed into other things such as purely **entertainment** models of music to even **secular** and even **pagan** forms of worship; this is **not a good track record**. Many people who have grown up under this kind of thing have left the movement for Rome or Orthodoxy or even out of Christianity altogether, because it just seems like there’s nothing left that is transcendent here. It’s all so comfortable, easy, buddy-buddy. It **demands almost nothing** of the worshiper, there is no cost, and it **offers little of lasting substance** in return. Just a mountain-top experience that can’t really get you through those difficult times of life, which is an ironic full-circle to why this little song was written in the first place.

How Shall I Ascend the Hill of the LORD?

Psalm 24 asks, “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?” (Ps 24:3). As we saw in our Introduction to Leviticus, the hill of the LORD or the “mountain” is one of the places in the OT where God frequently dwelt. It was, for lack of a better word, his home. Leviticus 1:1 begins in the parallel place to the mountain-home of God. This is the tabernacle or the “tent of meeting.”² So the psalmist is asking, who shall ascend to house of God, the place where God resides?

Why ask such a question? Because when God comes, it is a terrifying experience. Hebrews captures this perfectly. “So terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear’” (Heb 12:21; cf. Ex 19:6, 16; Dt 9:19). He wasn’t the only one. When Isaiah saw him he said, “Woe is me! I am undone” (Isa 6:5). Daniel said, “My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength” (Dan 10:8). When John saw him, he “fell at his feet as though dead” (Rev 1:17).

² It is difficult to know if this tent of meeting refers to the tabernacle itself or to the prior structure that existed prior to the making of the formal tabernacle. On the differences see Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 173 n. 8.

There are two reasons for this. First, **humans are sinful**. Isaiah was undone because he saw his sin in the light of Christ's presence. Second, **God is holy**. What were the Seraphim singing around the throne of the LORD? "**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts**" (**Isa 6:3**). To be "holy" is to be "other." The creation is so "other" than God that even the rocks tremble and the mountains flee at his coming (**Ps 18:7**; etc.). They aren't evil or sinful. They just aren't God.³

You can think of holiness in at least four ways. We usually think of it in **moral** categories. God is good, we are not. God never sins, we are full of sin. For humans, this is always in the background, even if it is only indirectly (for instance, through original sin). But you can also think of it in ritualistic and temporal and spatial categories. **Ritualistic** categories deal with things that are clean and unclean. Birds and houses with mildew and mixing types of clothing fall into this

³ **Going Deeper:** Many people have this idea that since the Seraphim are themselves holy that they are not sinful. Job tells us that "**He puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight, how much less one who is detestable and corrupt, man, who drinks iniquity like water**" (**Job 15:15**; cf. **4:18**; **25:5**). Paul tells us that there are "**elect angels**" (**1Ti 5:21**). Why would you need to be elect if you were perfect and sinless? My thought is that somehow, God does not charge his elect angels with unrighteousness in some kind of parallel way that he does not charge his human elect with unrighteousness. We are not told how this is done. The point I'm making is that compared to God, there is nothing that is inherently holy as he is holy. Even in heaven, when we are glorified even like the angels, it will be true that *were* sinful, even if, in Christ, we are no longer able to sin (and perhaps some of the angels are now like this too, we just don't know).

category. There is nothing inherently moral or immoral about those. **Temporal** categories deal with things like days. In the Ten Commandments, the seventh day is set apart as holy (**Ex 20:8-11**). There's nothing wrong with the other days, but they are not set apart as holy to the LORD. Both of these are found in various parts of Leviticus.

Spatial categories deal with things in proximity to the special presence of God. The entire world was viewed as an ever-increasing gradation of holiness as one got closer to God's special presence. Where he dwelt on the ark was the **Most Holy Place**. Through the curtain but still in the building was the **Holy Place**. Outside the door was the courtyard which was considered "**clean**" space. Once you left the courtyard, you left the tabernacle proper and went into the camp of Israel. This was considered **unclean** space. In the world beyond, it was **very unclean**, and all of this has to do with proximity to God's special presence.

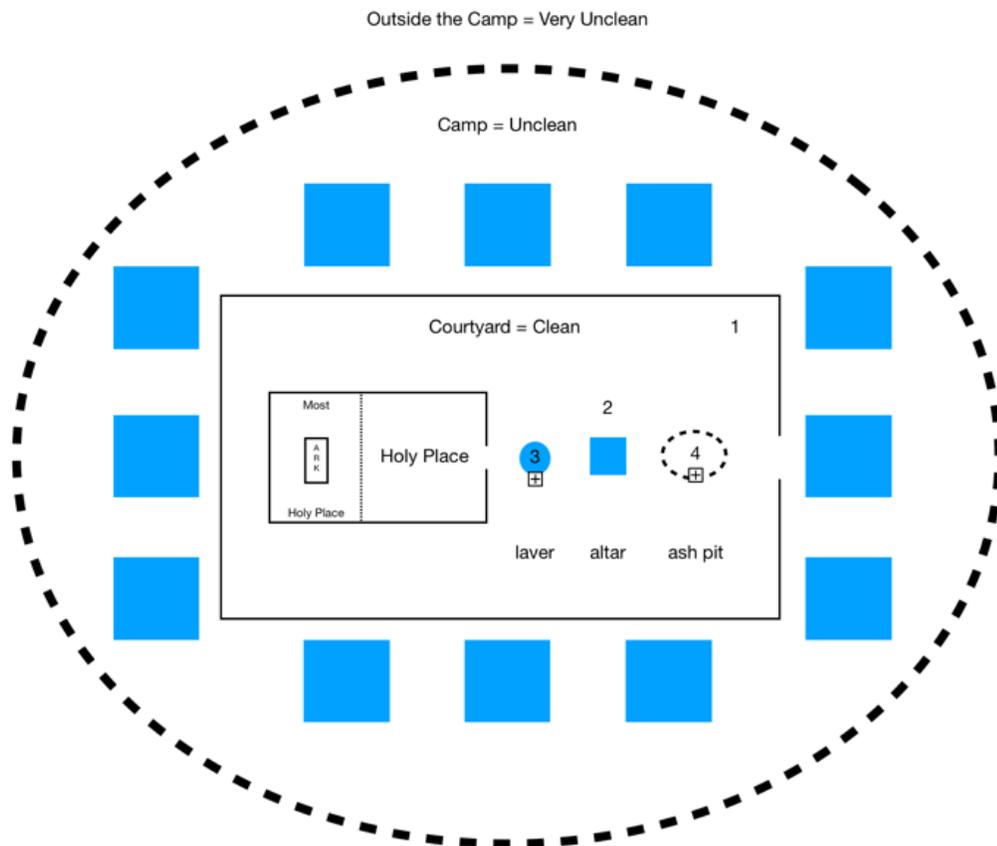


Table 1. Gradations of holiness

LIFE & NORMALITY	→	Increasingly abnormal	→	DEATH & TOTAL DISORDER	
Place	Very Holy	Holy	Clean	Unclean	Very unclean
Time	Holy of Holies Day of Atonement	Holy Place festivals, Sabbath	court common days	camp	outside camp
Persons Admitted	high priest	priest without deformity	priests, Levites, and Israelites who are clean	those who are clean but have minor impuri- ties	those with major impuri- ties and the dead
Animals	blood of perfect sacrificial animal	perfect sacrificial animals	clean animals	unclean animals	carcasses
Ritual	sacrificial (not eaten)	sacrificial (priests eat)	sacrificial (non- priests may eat)	purification (one day)	purification (seven days)

Table in Michael Jemphrey, "Translating the Levitical Sacrifices," *Journal of Translation* 3/1 (2007): 11

There is a movement that takes up the whole book of Leviticus which deals especially with the spatial category. The offerings start in the courtyard. The book then turns to the Holy Place, then the Most Holy Place, and then the Ark, and then it works itself back outward in a kind of **spatial chiasm**.

Leviticus Spatial Movement			
Courtyard	Holy Place	Most Holy Place	Ark
Lev 1-7	Lev 8-12	Lev 16-18	Lev 19
	Lev 22:26-24	Lev 20-22:25	
Lev 25-27			
Modified from Moshe Kline, "The Literary Structure of Leviticus," <i>The Biblical Historian</i> 2/3 (2006): 20 [1-28].			

The burnt offering stays in **the courtyard** (see the numbers in the diagram above for the movement of the ritual). In fact, we stay in the courtyard for the first few chapters. Normal people can't go in holy place, and these chapters are all about the common person. As the book moves along, we find that the ultimate source of holiness and forgiveness isn't in the entrance to the tabernacle, but at the very center of where

God himself dwells. In this way, the book will show us the increasing steps that have to be taken in order for the sin and creaturely problems to be taken care of.

The point is that in biblical religion, the response to God's presence, be it from the knowledge of one's own sinfulness, or simply God's holiness is **the opposite** of a sentimental feeling, or an exciting experience, or a happy-clappy familiarity with your best-broham. What has happened in Evangelicalism along these lines is itself quite terrifying to me, even as it was when Moses came down the mountain and it says, **"It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear"** (**Ex 32:18**). For at the bottom of the mountain, Israel had erected a massive **golden calf** and they were now busy-making God in their own image. They were, in effect, having a party with idolatry. And for it we read, **"Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain"** (**19**). They had **broken covenant**. And the LORD himself, that is Christ in the OT, said, **"I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath**

may burn hot against them and I may consume them” (Ex 32:9-10). In fact, this is the very reason Leviticus exists.

How Shall I Come Before the LORD?

Leviticus begins by assuming a similar question to the one in the Psalm. It is a question that arises precisely because of the golden calf story. It is a question the prophet Micah asks many centuries later. “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high?” (Mic 6:6) Now the question is not “who” but “how.” How shall I come before the LORD? This assumes that you may come before him, but you need to find out the manner that is appropriate.

Leviticus does this through a series of offerings: The burnt offering (ch. 1), the grain offering (ch. 2), the peace offering (ch. 3), the sin offering (4:1-5:13), and the guilt offering (5:14-6:7).⁴

⁴ These repeat themselves as this outline demonstrates:

1:1-6:7 (to the people)	6:8-7:38 (to the priests)
Burnt offering (Ch. 1) – archetype of all other offerings	Burnt offering (6:8-13)
Loyalty offering (Ch. 2) – soothing aroma	Loyalty offering (6:14-23)
Fellowship offering (Ch. 3) – occasions of thanksgiving	
Sin offering (4:1-5:13) – violation of commandments	Sin offering (6:24-30)
Reparation offering (5:14-6:7)	Reparation offering (7:1-10)
	Fellowship offering (7:11-21)
	Priestly portion of fellowship offering (7:28-36)
Compiled from Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, <i>Leviticus</i> , Apollos Old Testament Commentary 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 19ff.	

	עלה ' <i>olāš</i>	מנחה <i>minḥāh</i>	שלמים <i>sh^elāmîm</i>	חטאת <i>ḥaṭṭā't</i>	אשם ' <i>āshām</i>
KJV	burnt sacrifice	meat offering (<i>meat</i> is an archaic word for <i>food</i>)	peace offering	Sin offering	trespass offering
NASB	burnt offering	grain offering	peace offering	Sin offering	guilt offering
RSV	burnt offering	cereal offering	peace offering	Sin offering	guilt offering
NRSV	burnt offering	grain offering	sacrifice of well-being	sin offering	guilt offering
NIV	burnt offering	grain offering	fellowship offering	sin offering	guilt offering
TEV	burnt offering	offering of grain	fellowship offering	sin offering	repayment offering
GWN	burnt offering	grain offering	fellowship offering	offering for sin	guilt offering
NCV	whole burnt offering	grain offering	fellowship offering	sin offering	penalty offering
NLT	whole burnt offering	grain offering	peace offering	sin offering	guilt offering
REB	whole offering	grain offering	shared offering	purification offering	reparation offering

Table in Michael Jemphrey, “Translating the Levitical Sacrifices,” *Journal of Translation* 3/1 (2007): 20 [9-23].

Offering vs. Sacrifice. Just here, we should distinguish between **an offering and a sacrifice**. An “**offering**” (*Qorban: 1:2-3* or *ishshah: 1:9*) is essentially a gift to God offered by the worshipper. This is opposed to a “sacrifice” (*zebach*, from the word *mizbeach* or “altar”). A sacrifice referred “**almost exclusively to the slaughter of animals in order to create a**

meal.”⁵ In biblical sacrifices, it is usually the worshipper and the priest who eat together. Often, it is implied that God eats too. But I’ll save that discussion for Leviticus 3:1 where “sacrifice” first appears in our book. Sometimes you could “offer a sacrifice,” in which case there is overlap between the ideas. But in places like our text today, there is no sacrifice. It is only an offering, a gift to God.

The Burnt Offering

Today, we look at the burnt offering. It was the most common of all the offerings of the OT, being performed every morning and evening and on special days throughout the year.⁶ As such, it answers the question “How shall I come.” Indeed, immediately after Micah asks that question, he says, “... with a burnt offering?”

Why is It Being Offered?

⁵ R. E. Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 715. Averbeck notes that there are exceptions. For example, the burnt offering is called a zebach in Ex 20:24.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 52.

The passage begins, “Speak to the people of Israel...” (Lev 1:2). The Word then narrows it down. “When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD...” Why is the worshipper coming to bring an offering? It doesn’t tell us. It just says *whenever*. Unfortunately, it seems that the burnt offering was so common and so well understood in ancient days that the text doesn’t give us any more reason than this. So we have to infer from other places what those reasons might be.

For instance, *sin could be involved*. The first that we know of it is after the Flood. The LORD saw that every imagination of man’s heart was only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). He destroyed almost all of mankind because of sin. But after the flood Noah offered a burnt offering, “And when the LORD smelled the soothing aroma he thought, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth’” (Gen 8:21). It is important that *nothing changes in man* through this offering. Rather, it is *God’s disposition that is changed*. His wrath is averted.

Also very early, Job offers burnt offerings every week for each of his seven sons, “For Job said, ‘It may be that my

sons have sinned” (Job 1:5). After his ordeal is over, he offers a burnt offering for his friends so that God would not deal with them according to their folly (42:8). So, clearly, sometimes the burnt offering had sin directly in mind. Not that it cleansed the sin of the worshiper; but that it averted or “soothed” (to use anthropological language) God’s wrath that was due from it.

On the other hand, in 1 Kings 18 and the famous prophets of Baal story, Elijah poured water all over his burnt offering. Yet, the fire fell from heaven and consumed it. Then all the people shouted, “The LORD, he is God!” (1Kg 18:38-29). It was not being offered for the sins of anyone in particular. It was an offering of thanks and worship, after which all the people knew who the True God was, and the prophets of Baal were destroyed. In a similar way, Jethro simply acknowledged that the LORD is greater than all gods (Ex 18:11-12) when he offered his burnt offering. Abraham offered up a burnt offering in the place of Isaac, and no one had sinned there either (Gen 22:13). So, sin does not have to be involved, per se.

You will look in vain for the word “sin” in Leviticus 1. It just isn’t there. Thus, some scholars see the burnt offering

in this chapter as being offered as something done not for sin, but simply because of who God is. As Heiser puts it, “He’s not asking forgiveness” here. But this goes too far. Maybe he is. This is a general law, not a specific example. Most conservative scholars take the approach that the burnt offering is mainly if not only for sin. So one says, “The frequent presentation of whole [burnt] offerings enabled the covenant community, despite the human proneness to sin, to maintain fellowship with the holy God.”⁷ But this goes too far as well, at least directly speaking. Yes, sin is always in the background of us humans. This is unavoidable. But there are other sacrifices that deal directly with the sin question. Sometimes, we just want to approach God to be near him. Sometimes you have a special prayer you need to ask him, or you just want to come and thank him or praise him for something he has done for you. So, I’m taking a mediating approach that the purpose of the burnt offering was varied. Sin is always in the background, and parts of the ritual take this into account, but it may not be *the reason* the person is coming. We shouldn’t impose any one biblical example of it upon a general law like we find here.

⁷ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1992), 18.

Atonement

We have to look at this a little more through **three ideas** that immediately arise from the text. As you keep reading, you see that it talks about **laying his hand on the head of the burnt offering and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him (Lev 1:4)**. To “**make atonement**” seems to necessitate that he has to be offering this thing for specific sins. “Atonement” often deals with sin. But not always.

The problem is that our English word “atonement,” which literally comes from a combination of at-one-ment, meaning reconciliation, is always used with respect to sin, especially in systematic theology. And, of course, this is good and right.⁸

However, the Hebrew word is the letters *k-p-r*, and it is a very broad concept that makes up at least four nouns and two verbs. The basic meanings are **to pay a ransom** and **to purge or cleanse** (some add to cover, but this is disagreed upon). You can ransom and purge things where sin is not involved.

⁸ The Greek word used here is *ezilaskomai*, a form of *hilasmos*, which means propitiation. Propitiation usually deals with the wrath of God against sin, but not always. For example, in Exodus 30:15-16 LXX, there is no sin involved. They simply need to be protected by a God who is dangerous because he is so “other.”

As we will see when we look at the ritual, something is being **cleansed** here, but it is not worshipper. It is the altar. In fact, the tabernacle itself can must have “atonement” made for *it* (**Lev 16:16**), even though it isn’t sinful. Sin may be involved, but it might just be ritual uncleanness as well. There is a parallel here to Noah where the people are not changed by the burnt offering, God’s disposition is. The person is not changed, the altar is.

A **ransom** often carries the idea of paying for sin in some way, often by the idea of something substituting in its place (cf. **Ex 21:30; Prov 6:35**). Hence, a substitutionary atonement. But it isn’t always used this way. For instance, in **Exodus 30:12**, each Israelite pays a ransom (*kopher*) for himself (*nephesh*; soul) during a census. Not because sin is in mind, but because this is how they will all equally contribute to the building of the tabernacle (reminding me of the one body, many parts NT analogy). This ransom is not a sacrifice, not an animal or grain, but half a shekel—money. Certainly, that couldn’t atone for anyone’s sin, let alone your own sin!

And so if sin is involved, atonement is being made for it. But if it isn’t involved, the idea is about God’s holiness. In this way, it would be a lot like Aslan. “**Aslan is a lion- the**

Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion” ... “Safe?” said Mr Beaver ... “Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”⁹

Another example might be [Esther](#). She was married to the powerful King Ahasuerus. Yet, when she was told of a plot to murder all of her people by the wicked Haman, her uncle Mordecai pleaded with her to entreat the king. But this was a very serious business. For if the king was not pleased with her, he could kill her on the spot for daring to intrude unbidden. So it says, “On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, in front of the king’s quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight” ([Est 5:1-2](#)). He did not kill her but “[she won favor in his sight.](#)”

⁹ The story of David taking a census seems to relate to this law in some way. In his case, he wants to the people of Israel to be numbered. But this is clearly wrong (1Chr 21:3), though we are not told why. We do know that a plague breaks out upon the people and kills many of them, according to the choice that David made (12). But did the Israelites themselves commit sin here? No. Only David did. Of course, sin is still in the background, and I don’t think views like Heiser’s take this into account enough with the Burnt Offering (he does in other offerings).

This is how an Israelite was to think about approaching God. This is a main idea of the burnt offering. They want to approach God, but how would they come? The way he tells them to.

Laying Hands On It

In this same verse with “atonement,” the man “lays his hands” upon the animal. Again, some infer that this necessitates that sin is directly in play. The idea is that some kind of symbolic transfer of the man’s sin to the animal is going on.¹⁰ In other places, this is clearly true and it might be true here as well. But the symbolism, as powerful and important as that is, may also mean simply identifying the soul of the offeror with that animal. Not in some kind of magical way (per Milgrom, 1991: 151), but in a personal way such that this is my animal, it costs me something great to come here. I’m taking this very seriously LORD, that I’m coming into your presence. I realize that I’m moving from common ground (the animal is itself common), to the holy place where you are located (the animal becomes set apart as holy).¹¹ I know

¹⁰ See for example Jemphrey, 14-15.

¹¹ This is essentially Heiser’s view.

this isn't a frivolous time or a concert or a party. And I know that means for me if I don't obey.

That He May Be Accepted

Finally, it speaks of both the sacrifice and the sacrificer “being accepted.” Yet again, this can certainly have a moral component to it. If sin is the stated reason for the burnt offering, then that is obvious. He must be accepted because he is wicked, and he needs forgiveness. However, what if the uncleanness and the burnt offering is ritually related, such as him being a leper (Lev 14:19)? Leprosy is not unclean because it is morally wicked (of course, a leper couldn't enter the courtyard), even though he himself on a deeper level is.

My point in these three things (atonement, laying hands, being accepted) is to highlight that there are two components going on here. Not just sin, but also a God who is not like us, and even when sin is not involved, he is still not like us!

The Ritual

The Herd. Let's look at [the ritual itself](#). First, and perhaps most importantly, it must be [a male](#) ([Lev 1:3](#)) You could not bring a female of the herd to the LORD as a burnt offering. The one who would die must be a male. There seems to be something here of the idea of representation going on, that Adam was made first and then Eve.

Second but equally as important, it had to be “[without blemish](#).” You could not go to your flock and pick out some diseased animal that was going to die anyway. Nor did God want an animal that was missing a leg, or had a lame leg, or was born with two heads, or was in any other ritual way blemished (see [Lev 21:18-21](#) for a list). Again, there is some kind of representation going on. The sacrifice has to be [perfect](#). It is not this way with all offerings (see [Lev 22:23](#); the Peace Offering for example, Bonar, p. 20). So this must have some kind of utility for what is happening here. That utility is a type. Without a perfect offering, the ritual was meaningless.

Third, it must be brought to the “[entrance of the tent of meeting](#)” (3). This is the “[courtyard](#).”

Next, we move from the offering to the offeror. We have three different things the offeror must do, most are followed

by things that the priest must do in response. First, the offeror must **lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering** (4). Whatever else the symbolism may be, this is his offering, and so he is the one who puts his hands on its head.

Second, the offeror has **to kill the bull** before the LORD (5). He takes the knife and he kills it himself. This makes the act deeply personal. It is his bull; he takes its life. **In response**, Aaron's sons who are the priests are to bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. In That is, they are still in the courtyard. Notice that the blood is not applied to the person, but to the altar. The man himself cannot do it, but it can only be done through the intercessory work of the mediator—the priest chosen by God to do this duty.

Third, the offeror must **flay the burnt offering** and cut it into pieces (6). He kills it, the priest collects the blood, but now he, the offeror, begins to cut it up into pieces. This is his offering, not the priest's. He must do this work. In response, the priest, the sons of Aaron, put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire (7). Then, they take the pieces cut by the worshiper and arrange them in a specific order: the head and the fat are put onto the wood that is on the fire on

the altar (8). But the guts, the organs, and its legs he must wash with water (9) and then **burn all of it** on the altar.

The Flock. If the offering is not a bull but a sheep or goat from the flock, it must again be **a male without blemish** (10). Again, the offeror kills the animal himself. For some reason, it must be killed on the **north side** of the altar before the LORD (11). Is there some kind of symbolism with the north in play? I think we can only be speculative. Bonar writes, “**there was a necessity, for the sake of order, that there should be a separate place for killing *the oxen* and *the sheep*,**” and then speculates that it was necessary that everyone should see the sacrifice as soon as they walked through the east gate, nothing was obscuring its view.¹²

Kiuchi thinks, “**It possibly relates to the north side being on one’s left when facing east. If so, slaughtering the smaller ruminants may symbolize their powerlessness because one’s left, in the OT, sometimes represents defeat**” (cf. **Jer 1:14; 4:6; Ezek 1:4; 9:2**).¹³ Along similar lines, it should be noted that with the location of Israel in proximity to all other

¹² **Andrew A. Bonar**, *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus, Expository and Practical* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851), 29.

¹³ **Kiuchi**, 58.

lands, it is almost always **from the north that the enemies of Israel** come to invade,¹⁴ north is the direction of evil in the great incursion in Genesis 6 at Mt. Hermon, and often, Yahweh comes from the north in a theophany (cf. **Ps 29**). In other words, there could be some kind of symbolism that the sacrifice staves off evil or meets a Holy God who is not like us.

At any rate, after it is killed, the worshipper cuts it into pieces himself, “**with its head and its fat**” (12), just like we saw with the bull, and the priest arranges them on the wood of the fire on the altar just as before. Again, the entrails and legs are to be washed with water and the priest offers all of it, burning it all on the altar (13).

The Birds. The birds are slightly different. There is **no prescription that it has to be a male** (14), probably in part because it is quite difficult to determine the sex of these birds.¹⁵ There is also no prescription that it has to be without blemish. Someone speculates that this may be because the primary reason for the bird-offering seems to have been to help

¹⁴ See Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 8.

¹⁵ For example, **Miąsko Maciej**, Gruszczyńska Joanna, Florczuk Patrycja, Matuszewski Arkadiusz, “Determining Sex in Pigeons (*Columba Livia*),” *World Scientific News* 73:2 (2017): 109-114.

the poor and turtledoves and pigeons were readily accessible to anyone, even if they didn't own a bird. This would give them more latitude in finding a whole offering.¹⁶ Such is the grace of God.

It is curious that it is now **the priest who brings it to the altar** and wrings off its head and burns it on the altar (15). Again, we do not know the reason the offeror wouldn't do this himself. Perhaps there was some kind of ritualistic thing in play. At any rate, its blood was to be drained out on the side of the altar, he was to remove its crop (the pre-digestive food storage area near its throat) with its contents and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for the ashes (16). He would then tear it open by its wings, but not sever it completely and burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the first as a burnt offering (17), a food offering for God as the others are.

All of this is rather gruesome to modern sensibilities. But I like how Wenham summarizes it:

Using a little imagination every reader of the OT soon realizes that these ancient sacrifices were very moving occasions. They make modern church services seem tame and dull by

¹⁶ Hartley, 23.

comparison. The ancient worshipper did not just listen to the minister and sing a few hymns. He was actively involved in the worship. He had to choose an unblemished animal from his own flock, bring it to the sanctuary, kill it and dismember it with his own hands, then watch it go up in smoke before his very eyes. He was convinced that something very significant was achieved through these acts and knew that his relationship with God was profoundly affected by this sacrifice.¹⁷

It's Place and Purpose

So, **what is the meaning of all this?** What did it mean for them? What does it mean to the NT authors? What should it mean for us today?

Typology. My basic approach to all of these questions is that **they are related to one another.** For example, the New Testament isn't making up new meanings about these things in light of the Christ-Event. There are not different "meanings" to be had so much as there are different eschatological perspectives on one whatever the original meaning was.

¹⁷ **Wenham**, 55.

They lived before Christ; we live after Christ. **Christ is the one who gives the earlier offering its ultimate purpose and meaning.**

Thus, these questions are related together not as something old and something new but as something that is a **type** and something that is an **antitype**. Old and new might be totally unrelated. But type and antitype necessitate an inherent sameness on some level (like the picture of Abraham Lincoln on a penny is the “type” (literally typed onto a planchet) of the physical image that Abraham Lincoln had when he walked the earth.

The New Testament takes the language of the burnt offering and applies it **directly to Jesus’ death**. For example, he is **a male without spot or blemish**. He didn’t leave the offering up to someone else, but “**offered himself without blemish to God**” (**Heb 9:14**). He is the sacrificial “**lamb without blemish or spot**” (**1Pe 1:19**). It is not just part of his body that is offered up, but the whole body. It was a whole offering, as the word “burnt” is sometimes translated. Jesus died publicly, in the sight of all, not hidden in some way. Everyone had to be able to see him. Jesus identified with us as the man identifies himself with the animal by laying his hands

on it. Jesus took our sin upon himself through a kind of legal transfer from us to him. Jesus as the priest offered himself to God, sprinkled his blood, and so on. The whole point is that **Jesus fulfills this ritual** so that there is no need for there to be another burnt offering of an animal again.

However, **this does not mean the principle of the offering has ceased**. Rather, Christ presents the church “**without sport or wrinkle or any such thing, that she smight be holy and without blemish**” (**Eph 5:27**). Therefore, we are to be “**blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation**” (**Php 2:15**). We are to be “**found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace**” (**2Pe 3:14**). So it isn't that the fulfillment is one-and-done. Rather, the fulfillment is ongoing through the perpetual offering of Christ's church and people. We do not offer animals any longer, for we are the antitype and we offer ourselves to God.

Burnt Aroma. You can see more of this typology through one last thing I have not mentioned. This is the idea of the word “burnt.” This is a “**burnt**” offering. The word is *olah* and it probably means “**ascending**.” It refers to the smoke

and the aroma of the burning carcass. Three times it says it is “a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD” (Lev 1:9, 13, 17). Brendemuehl sang about her song being a sweet sweet sound in God’s ear. This offering is a sweet sweet smell in his nostrils.

These ideas overlap in the pleasure of God. Both have at the heart wanting God to be pleased with the worship. You don’t just assume he will be; you have to know it. In Leviticus, the worshiper is not left to doubt. If you do this, it will be a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And yet, this itself was a type, even in the OT. Again, when Micah says, “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high?” he continues, “Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?” (Mic 6:6). He is asking about our very offering in Leviticus 1. He continues, “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:7-8). Samuel said the same thing to Saul, “Has the LORD as great

delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams” (1Sa 15:22).

In other words, it isn't the sacrifice of itself that is the aroma, but the obedience of the worshiper to do as God has commanded. Hence, being “perfect.” The sacrifice has to be perfect. Not just in the ceremony, but in all of life! Thus, Christ was without sin (Heb 4:15; John 1:47; etc.). And so the burnt offering was to point the worshiper to the fact that the LORD's delight is when his people delight in obeying him in Christ. Thus, the NT says, “We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved” (2Co 2:15). This is the language of a burnt offering! We offer up to God acceptable worship, in Christ, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28), fire burns the offering.

We can gather something else from this idea of an offering rising in the air and smelling sweet to God. The aroma is a picture of getting God's attention. Of course, God knows when they came. This isn't meant to deny omniscience. It is a picture for our sake. Since I have no sense of smell, I can only tell you what others have told me. When an

unexpected aroma suddenly hits your olfactories, it rouses you to attention. It's like minding your business during a college football game you are watching in your living room, when suddenly you smell your neighbor cooking hamburgers! It is the same idea here. The worshiper has just come to God's front porch. God is inside the house. So, the aroma rouses him to recognize that someone has come knocking on his door. The aroma is his gift to God. It will be pleasing to him. The type is that the aroma of Christ's offering is so well-pleasing to him that it is offered once-for-all, and only in the light of his offering does your offering and worship make any sense.

The Cost

With that, let me return to how you should come before the LORD today? The burnt offering is a question **to the individual**. “**When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD...**” Thus, we are to ask ourselves, you are to ask yourself, “**How shall I come before the LORD?**” For this is what God is answering.

How many people even ask themselves such a question today? Do we not assume that I can come “Just as I am?” I don’t need anything to come before the LORD. I think people take that line from that song as a mantra, but they forget that Charlotte Elliott (1835) wrote her very next words, “Just as I am, without one plea, But that *Thy blood was shed for me. And that Thou bid’st me to come to Thee, O Lamb of God...*” In other words, Elliott actually has a sacrifice in mind, just like Leviticus does. This song, however, reads things in light of the NT reality.

It is not just as I am, but just as I am covered in Christ’s righteousness, the lamb of God whose sacrificial skins cover me to present me white as snow before the throne. Without that, you are undone if you come into his presence. Any sense that you can just “come as you are” apart from Christ has failed utterly at understanding God this God who is dangerous and the sin that brings down his wrath. And so if you know that you are not in Christ, you must trust him now to cover your sin with his perfect sacrifice that is pleasing to God. It will cover you once-for-all. No sin is too great that his blood cannot atone for it.

There is a **cost** to this. The offerer of the burnt offering had to offer his own animal, kill it himself, and make the offering himself. It was costly. David reflects upon when he says his burnt offering must not “**cost me nothing**” (2Sa 24:24). You pay for it or it comes from your herd or some other such thing. That’s the point.

Yet, remarkably, **for the poor**, the point of the turtle-dove or pigeon was that it was almost certainly not owned by anyone but picked up in a street and brought to the courtyard as a burnt offering. In this way, God was actually providing for those who had nothing to give to God, yet they might still be accepted. They could offer not just a song that would please God if they had nothing else, but literally a pleasing offering in the form of a bird even if they didn’t own one. Because God is gracious.

Both ideas come to fulfillment in Christ. For on one hand, you could not afford the true offering that would sooth God, so Jesus has offered himself as the pigeon for you who couldn’t afford an offering yourself. On the other hand, this offering was his own and **it was so costly** that he ended up sacrificing himself rather than an animal on your

behalf. Thus, it is both preciously costly and yet utterly free for the taking.

To conclude, I've made the point about [the unbearable lightness of being in God's presence](#) that so many people seem to have these days when they worship him. The burnt offering teaches you that this is not at all the truth of the matter. From type to antitype in Christ's own sacrifice, you learn that this God demanded a perfect male burnt offering. He received it at the cost of the human life of the Son of God. It is not becoming to approach his presence in any way other than taking this into serious consideration, especially in a day when it is so easy to take all this for granted precisely because they don't have to do these things anymore.

On the other hand, there is now [a fragrance so sweet](#) to God that he accepts your worship in Christ just as you are—forgiven, justified, sanctified in him by his Holy Spirit. Surely, this is what Brendemuehl was looking for when she penned her song. Even if she didn't say it. But now you can see more fully how God can take joy in your presence, not because of a mere song (though they did sing psalms at the burnt offering), but because the offering itself has been made once-for-all for you who trust in Christ Jesus.

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