

VII. Sacred Acts: Burnt Offerings

July 16, 2017

Chapter 7

Purpose: To understand the basic purposes of Old Testament sacrifices and to see in the whole burnt offering a picture of blood atonement through a substitute.

Key Verses: ⁶In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. **Burnt offering** and sin offering you have not required. ⁷Then I said, “Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: ⁸I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:6-8).

Longman: Certainly, there was more to worship in the Old Testament than sacrifice. Songs were sung, prayers were offered, the Word was read and reflected upon. However, we focus on sacrifice here for two reasons. In the first place, it is the strangest aspect of Israel’s worship to us living in the twenty-first century, and so it needs more explanation than do other Old Testament worship acts. Second, in an important sense... sacrifice was a crucial aspect to Old Testament worship. To worship God, people must be in His presence. But it is not easy to be in God’s presence. Human beings are sinners, covenant breakers. God’s holy judgment would break out against any sinner who dared to come into His presence. Sacrifice was the way that the Old Testament saints recognized and atoned for their sin as they came before the Lord (p. 75).

Longman: At Sinai, God gave Moses instructions concerning the types of sacrifices He wanted His faithful people to offer Him. In Leviticus 1-7 we have the description of five different kinds of sacrifices, each with its own ritual, and all with different but overlapping purposes (p. 77).

Poythress: The tabernacle was finally constructed and the cloud symbolizing God’s presence settled on the tabernacle (Ex. 35-40). Yet sinfulness on the part of the people clearly remained a continuing problem. The entire contents of Leviticus deal in one way or another with this problem. ... In short, the entire contents of Leviticus are in principle related to the tabernacle and to the obligations of purity that derive from it. Leviticus sums up the matter in the words, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2; cp. 1 Pe. 1:16). The people could not survive alongside the tabernacle unless they respected the holiness of God and maintained holiness themselves (pp. 41-42).

A. The Three Functions of Sacrifice

Poythress: But how do sacrifices fit into this general principle? They are the means for cleansing and removing defilement of the people and of the tabernacle. Thus they are a central means for maintaining the holiness of the people and the tabernacle, and thus ensuring that the earthly things continue to reflect the holiness of God. Special sacrifices must be presented when individual Israelites have sinned, even unknowingly, and when the priest or the whole community has sinned (Lev. 4). ... But animal sacrifices are ultimately inadequate. Israel goes on sinning year by year, and new animals must be presented year after year in the same repetitious ceremonies (Heb. 10:1-4). ... The process never suffices. Animals could never be an adequate substitute for human beings made in the image of God. The very inadequacy of these sacrifices confirms the inadequacy associated with the tabernacle structure. They are only copies of the heavenly realities. Their inadequacies have only one remedy. God must provide the

Lesson VII – Sacred Acts: Burnt Offerings

ultimate sacrifice (Gen. 22:8). ... The Old Testament thus reaches out in longing for Christ who brings an end to its frustrations and brings to accomplishment its promises. Christ is the final offering to which all the animal sacrifices look forward.

1. Atonement

Longman: Atonement is arguably the most fundamental function of sacrifice.... “Atonement” is an English word contrived from the phrase “at-one-ment.” It denotes making a unity, restoring a relationship. The idea behind it is that sin has created a break in the relationship between God and His human subjects. Sacrifice is an integral part of the ritual that reestablishes the unity between God and humans.... The Hebrew verb translated “atone” is *kipper*, the piel of the root *kapar*.... The word means “atone” and involves our reconciliation with God after sin has broken the harmony of that relationship (pp. 78-79).

2. Gift

Longman: A second significance of a sacrifice is that it is a gift to God. As we will see below in particular with the *minhah* sacrifice, God is our King, and we as His subjects must bring Him gifts. Of course, God does not need our gifts for His sustenance, but He does in some sense derive pleasure from receiving them from us (pp. 78-79).

3. Fellowship or Communion

Longman: Some sacrifices—note in particular the *shelamim* sacrifice—emphasize fellowship. This indicates in the first place a communion between God and the worshiper, but also between the worshipers generally and the priestly community in particular. This aspect of sacrifice is highlighted in that not all of the offering is devoted to God, but certain designated parts of the sacrifice can be eaten by the circle of worshipers (p. 79).

B. The ‘olah Sacrifice (Whole Burnt Offering)

1. The Description of the ‘olah Sacrifice

- a) Described in Leviticus 1; 6:8-18
- b) Most important sacrifice at Israelite festivals (Num. 28-29)
- c) Offered twice daily, morning and evening (Num, 28:1-8)
- d) ‘olah is often translated “(whole) burnt offering”
- e) ‘olah means “rising up”, which refers to the smoke of the burnt offering
- f) The smoke rose to the heavens, where it was “very pleasing” to God (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17)

2. The Procedure of the ‘olah Sacrifice

- a) Sacrificial animal brought to the entrance of the tabernacle
- b) The worshiper laid his hands on the head of the animal

Longman: It is with this act that we get at the heart of the significance of the ‘olah sacrifice: “So the LORD will accept it as your substitute, thus making atonement for you” (Lev. 1:4). ... This

Lesson VII – Sacred Acts: Burnt Offerings

hand-laying ritual was certainly to be understood as a mode of identification. It was not a magical transference between the one offering sacrifice and the animal, but rather a symbolic identification. This step was crucial because when the animal was sacrificed, clearly the death of the animal occurred in place of the death of the worshiper. The assumption behind this was that the worshiper was a sinner coming into the presence of a holy Lord (Lev. 1:5). As a sinner, the human participant deserved death, but the animal stood in his or her place (p. 80).

- c) The worshiper then slaughtered the animal (slit the throat)
- d) Blood was collected and sprinkled against the side of the altar by the priest

Longman: Indeed, anything having to do with the blood and the altar was the responsibility of the priest. The altar represented the presence of God, and the drained blood highlighted the death of the animal (p. 80).

Poythress: The worshiper has raised the animal himself or paid for it with his earnings, so that the animal represents a “sacrifice” in the modern sense of the word. It costs something to the worshiper, and a portion of the worshiper’s own life is identified with it. The worshiper lays his hand on the head of the animal, signifying his identification with it. He then kills the animal at the entranceway into the courtyard, signifying that the animal dies as a substitute for the life of the worshiper. From that point onward the priest takes over in performing the sacrificial actions. The intervention of the priest indicates that a specially holy person must perform the actions necessary to present the worshiper before God, even after the death of the animal. The priest takes some of the blood and sprinkles it on the sides of the bronze altar [for a burnt offering]. ... All of these actions constitute the permanent marking of the altar as testimony to the fact that the animal has died. ... Blood is sprinkled on the sides of the bronze altar, signifying a recleansing of the altar (Lev. 1). This procedure suggests that the altar threatens to be defiled by the mere presence of imperfect people in the courtyard (pp. 44-45).

- e) The carcass was prepared (skinned, cut into pieces, internal organs washed)
- f) Entire animal was placed on the altar by the priests and burned completely, with the smoke rising up to please the Lord (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17)

Poythress: Of all the animal sacrifices, this one alone is to be entirely burned. What does this complete burning signify? Many interpreters have suggested that the idea of entire dedication and consecration to God is uppermost. The burning of the whole animals might certainly suggest this meaning to an Israelite, but the meaning might just as likely be entire destruction. Actually, the two possible meanings are complementary. If we focus on what happens to the animal, entire destruction is the most obvious meaning. The animal represents the worshiper, so we may infer that the entire destruction of the worshiper is signified. But the worshiper is not destroyed but preserved. Because of the substitutionary value of the animal, the worshiper and the priest can remain alive—we might say that they can enjoy new life. Hence, what happens to them does suggest entire dedication to God. But this entire dedication is accomplished by an entire destruction of the substitute, superimposed on an entire preservation or even resurrection of the worshiper (p. 48).

3. The *‘olah* and Atonement

Longman: That the *‘olah* had implications for atonement is explicit in Leviticus 1, particularly in verse 4, which reads, “Lay your hands on its head so the LORD will accept it as your substitute, thus making atonement for you.” It is clear that the death of the animal represented the death of

Lesson VII – Sacred Acts: Burnt Offerings

the sinner approaching the presence of God. It was the worshiper who deserved to die, but God accepted the animal as a substitute. This acknowledgement of sin and its consequences was the most important aspect of the *'olah* sacrifice. That the entirety of the sacrifice (with the exception of the hide – Lev. 7:8) was burned indicates that this sacrifice emphasized the importance of the atonement function at the expense of gift and fellowship (p. 81).

Longman: Reading Leviticus 1 in the context of the whole Bible leads us to the understanding that the sacrifice did not automatically lead to atonement and the forgiveness of sins.... In other texts we clearly see that offering a sacrifice without the right attitude has absolutely no effect on the status of the worshipers before God. According to Micah 6:6-8 (p. 81):

⁶“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? **Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will 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?” ⁸He 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? (Micah 6:8).

Longman: This sentiment is expressed also by Hosea (cp. Hos. 6:6), as well as David (cp. Ps. 40:6-8).... In this regard, sacrifice is similar to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, outward signs of an inward reality. The procedure, particularly the blood manipulation emphasizes this.

4. The Animal Used in the Ritual

- a) Different animals could be sacrificed depending on the economic status of the offerer
 - (1) Bull (Lev. 1:3-9)
 - (2) Sheep or Goat (Lev. 1:10-13)
 - (3) Bird (Lev. 1:14-17)
- b) It was not the cost of the gift but the motive that was important (Ps. 69:30-32)
- c) But if you could afford a more expensive sacrifice, a cheaper sacrifice was not acceptable

Longman: Right from the beginning we can see godless individuals trying to get away with something less than the best. In Genesis 4, we see Cain and Abel bringing a sacrifice to the Lord, with opposite results.... While Cain’s sacrifice is described very plainly, Abel’s lamb is described as “choice” and “the best of the flock” (Gen. 4:4).

DSB: In addition, Abel rightly offered a burnt sacrifice, an animal as a substitute for atonement. Cain offered a bloodless sacrifice, vegetables of the field, representative of his own works, but not given in place of his life.

5. Summary on the *'olah* Offering

Longman: An argument can be made that the *'olah* sacrifice is foundational to the sacrificial system. We have seen that it was offered daily as part of the set ritual of the sanctuary, as well as at every yearly festival, with the exception of the Day of Atonement. Furthermore, individuals would bring their own bull, sheep, lamb, goat, or bird for their own personal

Lesson VII – Sacred Acts: Burnt Offerings

sacrifice. The prevalence of the *'olah* should be connected to its primary function as an atonement for sin. Later, we will see that other sacrifices also had atonement value, but either that was a secondary theme of the sacrifice (*shelamim*) or the atonement was for a special type of sin (*hattat* and *asham*).... This central atoning significance of the *'olah* would account for its important use in the New Testament.

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.** ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

C. Selected Questions for Further Reflection

1. What was it about the *'olah* that made it the foundational sacrifice?
2. Why were there different sacrifices and not just one?
3. The *'olah* was foundation to Old Testament worship. Is there anything so foundational in today's worship?

Next Week: Read Longman chapters 8 & 9