

The Burnt Offering (Leviticus 1, 6:8-13)

To Read:

1. Romans 1:18-32
2. Hebrews 10

I. Introduction

1 A. This morning we are starting our actual study of Leviticus together

1. So, if we put our outline up on the board, we're starting the first half of the book, what we've titled "Judicial Holiness," which is answering the question, "How do we become holy?"
2. And we're starting the first subsection, what we've titled "Provision for holiness" in Leviticus 1-7 which describes the sacrificial system

B. Leviticus 1-7 reads very much like a 'user's manual' for how to perform sacrifices

1. Because of that, sometimes it can sound really dull and repetitive - it's written so that whatever sacrifice is being brought and whatever role you have in the sacrifice, you can flip the book open to that section and read it and know what you are supposed to do
2. But, like I said, it can make these chapters seem much duller than they really are - most of us don't enjoy sitting down with a good user's manual and reading it through from cover to cover, that's not what we do for fun...
3. But that first impression is deceptive - these chapters are actually full of meaning - full of meaning but written in a way that would be the most useful to the first recipient, those who would actually experience these sacrifices
4. So an important part of understanding the content of these chapters is to put ourselves in the place of the ancient worshipper, to try to see what they are seeing, to feel what they are feeling
5. And the user manual is actually an excellent tool for that - it describes in detail what happens in each sacrifice so we can read ourselves into the story and understand its significance

C. As we go through Leviticus 1-7, we're going to see two major sections

1. Leviticus 1:1-6:7 is a user's manual for the Israelite who was bringing a sacrifice - it is written to the general Israelite, and starts in Leviticus 1:2 - *"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 livestock from the herd or from the flock.*
2. Leviticus 6:8-7:38 is a user's manual for the priest who was mediating at the sacrifice - it is written to the priesthood and starts in Leviticus 6:8 - *"Command Aaron and his sons, saying,*
3. Because there are actually two complementary user's manuals here, we're going to see each sacrifice mentioned twice - once in the first section and once in the second
4. I think for the purpose of our study, though, we're going to look at both sections at the same time, so we're going to spend one week on each sacrifice listed here at the beginning of Leviticus

1 D. And we see five types of sacrifice as we read these first chapters of Leviticus

1. First, we're going to look at the Burnt Offering - which is what we are going to cover this week
2. Next week, we're going to look at the Grain Offering
3. Then we'll see the Peace Offering, the Sin Offering, and finally the Guilt Offering

1 E. Let's Read Leviticus 1 and Leviticus 6:8-13

F. Each of these offerings is going to teach us something about the nature of sacrifice and what it means to approach a holy God - how can we approach the God who dwells in our midst?

1. So, for this week, in the burnt offering, our **PROPOSITION** is going to be: The burnt offering shows us that we are unacceptable before God and His wrath burns against us, so we need a propitiating sacrifice that will turn away God's wrath and make us acceptable before God.
2. And we'll try to unpack this passage by asking the three questions I laid out last week (and this will be our outline this morning):
3. What did it teach the ancient Israelites about God?
4. How should this point us to Christ?
5. How should this be applied to the New Testament believer?

1 II. What did it teach the ancient Israelites about God?

A. As we start to look at our passage this morning, I want to try to understand, as much as possible, what the Israelite worshipper might have felt or should have felt as he came to present his offering

1. So we're going to walk through this instruction passage and try to recreate the scene that the first worshippers might have experienced and think through what it communicated to them
2. What did the rituals of this sacrifice teach the worshipper about God - and we'll see four things

1 B. First, they brought a sacrifice because they were not acceptable in God's presence

1. This is the impetus for the sacrifice, that they weren't worthy to be in God's presence, they would not be accepted in God's presence
- 1 2. Leviticus 1:3 - *He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.*
 - 1 a. And it's repeated in verse 4, in case they missed it the first time - *He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him ...*
 - b. The clear implication is that apart from the sacrifice, he would not be accepted before the LORD
 - c. Sin's blemish was an affront to God's glory, His majesty and His holiness and would not be tolerated in His presence - God's wrath burned against sin and would destroy any sinner in His presence
 - d. Any man foolish enough to approach God's presence only invited God's wrath upon himself
3. So every time a worshipper approached the tabernacle, or later the temple, he was reminded of his unworthiness before God, he was reminded that God's wrath burned against him
 - a. These instructions screamed at him, "Unacceptable! Unacceptable! You cannot approach."
 - b. If he wanted to approach, he needed to acknowledge this truth - he was a sinner, he had rebelled against God, he had been corrupted, polluted by the stain and God's wrath burned against him
 - c. If he wanted to approach, he needed to bring an offering that made him acceptable before God

1 C. Second, the sacrifice showed them that only their death would appease God's wrath

- 1 1. A very important part of this offering is seen in verse 4 - *He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering,*
 - a. In fact, we're going to return to that statement a couple of times this morning
 - b. But this was a statement of identification - He laid his hand on the head of the sacrifice to say, "this sacrifice is me; what happens to this sacrifice is what I deserve from God" - and then he watched
2. And what happened next wasn't pretty
 - 1 a. Leviticus 1:5 - *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.*
 - b. The sacrifice was slaughtered, it was drained of blood, and the blood was thrown against the sides of the altar to appease God, to display that the trespasser had been destroyed
 - c. As the worshipper stood by and watched, he knew that the only thing that would appease God's wrath would be his death - God's wrath against sin demanded his death
3. But the passage doesn't stop there - in fact, his death wouldn't be enough
 - 1 a. So, Leviticus 1:6 - *Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,*
 - i. The animal had been slaughtered and the blood had been thrown against the side of the altar as evidence of its death, but still that wasn't enough, God's wrath had not been satisfied
 - ii. No, then the animal was dismembered and cut into quarters - death wasn't enough, after death the animal was hacked into pieces
 - 1 b. And still, that wasn't enough, Leviticus 1:7-8 - *and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 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; 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*
 - i. The animal had been killed, drained of blood, the lifeless corpse mutilated and desecrated, and now it must be burned
 - ii. Now, I'm sure that many unfaithful Israelites could go through this ritual without feeling anything, but any faithful Israelite who had truly identified himself with his sacrifice should have been horrified
 - iii. That is what should happen to me, that's what my sin has bought me - God's wrath burns so fiercely against my sin that it will continue to destroy me even past death
4. The burnt offering was designed to make the Israelite feel most deeply what Paul would later say very clearly
 - 1 a. Romans 6:23 - *For the wages of sin is death* - Every Israelite should have understood that so clearly - God hates me and wants to utterly destroy me, that's all that sin has every truly brought me
 - b. For God to be satisfied requires my utter destruction

1D. Third, the fire on the altar showed them that God's wrath against sinners would never abate

1. For this third truth, we're going to turn to the second set of instructions about the burnt offering, the instructions to the priests in chapter 6
 - a. And the instruction to the priests adds and emphasizes one thing very strongly
 - 1b. Leviticus 6:9 - *This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it.*
 - 1c. Or again, Leviticus 6:12-13 - *The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.*
 - d. The fire was never to go out - that was part of the priests job description, but it also communicated something
 - e. That fire represented God's wrath, the wrath that would consume and destroy sinners and it would never go out - it would burn perpetually, it would burn forever, nothing would ever quench it
 - f. God's not about to forget how much He hates sin; He's not going to be angry for a while and then forget about it - His anger stands forever
2. God's wrath against sin would burn until the sinner had been completely consumed
 - a. Leviticus 6 also tells us how long the sacrifice should remain on the altar burning - until there was nothing left
 - 1b. Leviticus 6:10-11 - *And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.*
 - c. The burnt offering wasn't burnt a little bit, it was completely consumed, reduced to ashes and then thrown outside the camp
3. The fire on the altar reminded the Israelites that their God was a consuming fire, a terrifying presence
 - 1a. So Moses reminds them in Deuteronomy 4:24 - *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*
 - 1b. And Isaiah calls Judah to fear, Isaiah 33:14 - *The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: "Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?"*
 - 1c. And a large part of that fear was that the fire that burned against the adversary will never be quenched, Isaiah 66:24 - *"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."*
 - 1d. And Jeremiah warns Judah, Jeremiah 21:12 - *"Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed, lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil deeds."*
 - 1e. And lest we think our God has changed, Hebrews 12:29 repeats for us - *our God is a consuming fire.*
4. God hates sin, He hates it with a consuming passion forever, He will never forget His hatred or relent from His wrath, the sinner must be destroyed

- 1 E. Now, this is all very dour and hopeless, but this passage is actually filled with hope, because the fourth truth was: Their only hope was in identifying with a substitutionary sacrifice**
1. The burnt sacrifice did clearly communicate to the Israelite the depth of God's hatred for sin, His wrath that would destroy the sinner, but it also provided an answer
 - 1 2.** Leviticus 1:4 - *He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.*
 - a. When the Israelite laid his hand on the head of the burnt offering, he wasn't merely saying, "what happens to this animal is what should happen to me," he was also saying, "this animal represents me, this animal is taking my place, what happens is happening to this animal instead of me."
 3. The sacrifice made atonement for him, it made him acceptable before God
 - a. And atonement is one of the main themes of Leviticus, although a definition for this Hebrew word is hard to come by - some older scholarship suggested that it meant a covering - something that covered over sin and turned away wrath; newer scholarship suggests it means a washing - something that washes away sin
 - b. But, I'm not sure that scholarly debates are the most helpful - we learn what atonement is from seeing the pictures of atonement - atonement is what is happening in this offering
 4. The worshipper brought a substitute, a substitute that would be destroyed in His place, a substitute that would bear God's wrath on His behalf so that He could go an approach God
 - a. The burnt offering absorbed God's wrath so that God could be pleased with the worshipper
 - b. We have a fancy Greek word that describes this sort of sacrifice - propitiation, which means a sacrifice that makes God happy
 - c. Sin had made God very angry, it had provoked His wrath, but a sacrifice was brought that would absorb and bear God's wrath so that God could be happy again
 - d. His wrath would never cease, but it could be turned aside to something else, something provided in their place
 5. So, when the worshipper came with his burnt offering and laid his hand on the head of the offering, he was saying, "I need a substitute to bear God's wrath on my behalf"
 - a. His only hope was that something or someone else would bear God's wrath on his behalf, and he said, "I'm going to put my trust in that - I'm going to approach because God's wrath will be absorbed by the sacrifice."
- 1 F. As we go through the sacrifices, I want to make a little chart that helps us understand what each sacrifice teaches us**
- 3 1.** It will have three columns - the sacrifice; what does this teach us about sin?; and what does this teach us about sacrifice?
 - 1 2.** The burnt offering teaches us that sin has made God very angry with us, sin has provoked God's wrath
 - 1 3.** So we need a sacrifice that will absorb and turn away God's wrath, a sacrifice that will make us acceptable before God again
- 1 G. And kid's, here's your kid's question for today: What does the burnt offering teach us?**
- 1 1.** We need a sacrifice that absorbs God's wrath.

① III. How should this point us to Christ?

① A. First, in contrast to us, Christ was the only acceptable one before God

1. At the center of this passage is the idea that for the worshipper to approach God, something acceptable had to be substitute for that which was unacceptable, something unblemished must be offered in place of the blemished
 - a. As the faithful worshipper in ancient Israel put his hope in his sacrifice, it should have shown him that he needed a perfect sacrifice, a sinless man to take his place
 - b. That is the hope and promise wrapped into the burnt offering, God would accept a perfect sacrifice and welcome us into His presence again
2. But the problem was: there was no perfect sacrifice
 - a. There was no real substitute, no sinless man - the best they could do was a poor representation embodied in an animal without defect
 - b. But there should have been a longing for something better, a longing for the one who really would be acceptable in God's sight, the one who could bring others into God's presence
3. And, on this side of history, we can rejoice as we see that Jesus is this perfect one - the man without spot or blemish, the man without any stain of sin
 - ① a. So Peter can say, in I Peter 2:22 - *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.*
 - ① b. Or Jesus Himself could say, in John 8:29 - *And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."*
 - ① c. So Jesus could be the perfect substitute, the one without blemish or spot, the one who could offer Himself in the place of the blemished, which is exactly what Peter say sin I Peter 1:18-19 - *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

① B. Second, fulling the sacrifice, He would die as the substitutionary sacrifice to appease God's wrath

1. The purpose of the burnt offering was for the substitute to absorb the wrath of God so that the worshipper could draw near, so that the worshipper could be made acceptable
2. And this is exactly what the sacrifice of Christ has done for us - absorbed the wrath of God on our behalf
 - ① a. So Paul says, I Thessalonians 1:10 - *[you are waiting] for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*
 - ① b. Or again in Romans 5:9 - *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*
 - ① c. And John says (remembering that propitiation means to appease God's wrath), I John 2:2 - *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*
3. And because Jesus bore God's wrath on our behalf, we are welcomed into God's presence again - Jesus' sacrifice has brought us near to God
 - a. So Peter tell us, I Peter 3:18 - *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,*
 - b. And Paul says, Ephesians 2:13 - *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*
4. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the picture of the burnt offering by bearing God's wrath on our behalf so that we can approach God again

1 C. And, third like the fire that would never cease, His sacrifice has appeased God's wrath forever

1. One of the most emphasized parts of the burnt offering was the fire that was never to go out
 - a. And once again, Jesus fulfills this part of the picture of the burnt offering, but He does so by inverting it or making a contrast with what went before
 - b. Whereas before the wrath of God would never abate, now the peace of God will never end
 - c. Now, I'm not saying Jesus is changing something about God's nature - His wrath against sin will never abate, but rather that His sacrifice was so complete that God's eternal, unceasing wrath has been completely absorbed
2. And so, whereas God was our unceasing enemy, now we are at peace
 - 1 a. So Paul says, in Ephesians 2:13-16 - *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*
 - 1 b. Or again, in Romans 5:1 - *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
3. And Paul rejoices in the truth that our position before God will never change - no charge against us will ever stand, God will never turn against us again
 - 1 a. Romans 8:31-39 - *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died---more than that, who was raised---who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
4. The burnt offering longed for a fulfillment, a fulfillment that perfectly happened in Jesus

① IV. How should we apply this to ourselves?

A. Having meditated on the meaning of the burnt offering and looked at how it points us to Christ, I want to take a few minutes and meditate on what the burnt offering means for us

1. What does the burnt offering call us to? Obviously, we aren't called to make burnt offerings anymore, but what are we to do in reaction to this passage?
2. And, we'll make three brief and basic points of application this morning

① B. First, we must rightly reckon with God's wrath

1. As I said before, I think a large part of understanding and applying the instructions in Leviticus is to merely read a dry instruction manual, but to imagine what the event was like
 - a. And as we do so, we need to read ourselves into the story and try to understand how these things should make us feel
2. And as we look at the burnt offering, one of the first things we should feel is the terror of God's wrath
 - a. The burnt offering was designed to show the depth and destructiveness of God's wrath and to cause God's people to tremble before His presence
 - b. The faithful Israelite should have trembled as his animal was slaughtered and hacked in pieces and burned on the altar, and so should we
3. Many people want to downplay the wrath of God, but if we want to come to God correctly, we can't - if the burnt offering shows us anything, it is that we must reckon with God's wrath before we can come into His presence
 - a. We need to acknowledge that we are sinners, full of sin and that God rightly hates us and rightly desires our utter and eternal destruction
 - b. And we need to feel the trembling fear that that truth provokes - now I'm not saying a believer should stay in abject fear of a terrible God, but you can't become a Christian without experiencing that fear, without knowing that fear
 - c. And, though that fear is cast out by the work of Christ, it doesn't completely vanish, instead it grows into a healthy fear and respect, a right understanding of the wrath that God feels for sin - the wrath that God would feel for us apart from Christ
4. So, as Proverbs often mentions, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom - understanding Him as a consuming fire, a terrible judge is the first step to approaching Him correctly
 - ① a. Proverbs 1:7 - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*
 - ① b. Proverbs 9:10 - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*
 - ① c. Proverbs 15:33 - *The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.*
5. We can't run away or hide from the wrath of God, if we want to approach God, we need to come face to face with His wrath, acknowledge its existence, acknowledge that it burns against us, and fear our holy judge

① C. Which drives us to, second, we must find our identity in the substitute

1. This is what a healthy fear of God drives us to - to put our faith in the substitute
 - a. The faithful Israelite should have trembled at the display of God's wrath wrapped up in the burnt offering, but could also rejoice because God had provided a substitute, a propitiating sacrifice to bear the wrath of God on His behalf
 - b. The burnt offering never accomplished anything for anyone - as Hebrews tells us, God never desired the blood of bulls and goats, but as the faithful Israelite identified himself with his sacrifice and offered it on his behalf he was placing his trust in God's future provision, the final propitiation
2. And we must do the same thing - we can't face the wrath of God without looking in earnest for something to absorb and turn aside God's wrath, a substitute to take our place
 - a. We must do the exact same thing as the first worshipper and place our faith in the substitute
 - ① b. So Paul will say, at the height of his argument in Romans 3, verse 23-35 - *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*
 - c. If we know what it means to fear the wrath of God, then we must grasp onto the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf - we need to say, like the ancient Israelite, this should have been me, but He took my place
3. In other words, like the ancient Israelites, we need to place our hand on the head of the sacrifice and say, "this should have been me, but I can't bear Your wrath, so please accept this, the great sacrifice of Your own Son, in my place."
 - a. The burnt offering shows us what faith is - to identify ourselves with Christ's sacrifice; to say, "that should have been my death, but He died for me so that I can approach God."

1D. Which leads to, third, we must approach God with reverence and worship and awe

1. The entire point of the burnt offering was to make God's people acceptable to approach God, so that they wouldn't stand far off forever
 - a. So, if we have put our faith in the greater propitiation, the greater sacrifice that bore God's wrath, then we should be drawing near to offer God acceptable worship
12. In fact, this is one of the concluding statements of Hebrews, which considers what the temple and sacrificial system and priesthood meant for the New Testament believer, Hebrews 12:28-29 - *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*
 - a. If our faith is in the offering, then our fear is not a fear that keeps us far off, but a fear that calls us to gratefulness and worship
 - b. So we ought to be drawing near to God, to offer acceptable worship because Christ has made us acceptable before God
 - c. But we must always remember the great sacrifice, so we come with reverence, a holy sobriety recognizing God's terrible majesty, and awe, a holy wonder at what God has done for us, never forgetting that our God is a consuming fire
3. If your faith is in the sacrifice, then you should be drawing near - drawing near in prayer, drawing near in reading God's Word, drawing near in corporate worship together - to not draw near is neglecting what the offering does for us
 - a. And as you draw near, draw near with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire