

The Book of Leviticus

Lesson 1: Offerings of Worship: Burnt and Grain Offerings -- Leviticus 1:1–2:16

Picture the scene. Israel has just been rescued. The sea split, the plagues ended, the chains of Egypt fell off, and now a redeemed people camps at the foot of a smoking mountain. The tabernacle has been built exactly as God commanded, gold and acacia and blue and scarlet, and the glory of the Lord has filled it so densely that even Moses cannot enter. And then, out of that glory, a voice. The book of Leviticus opens not with a thunderclap of judgment but with an invitation: God speaks. He wants these people near. The whole question of the book is suddenly on the table. How can a sinful people live in the neighborhood of a holy God without being consumed?

We are tempted to skim Leviticus. The cattle and the entrails and the careful instructions about handfuls of flour feel a world away from us. But slow down. Every detail here is God answering the deepest question a human heart can ask: Can I come close to God, and if so, on whose terms? Notice that Israel did not invent these offerings. They did not brainstorm what might please God. He told them. Worship, from the very first verse, is response to revelation. We approach God the way He says, or we do not truly approach Him at all.

The first two chapters give us two offerings that set the tone for everything else. The burnt offering, where the entire animal goes up in smoke, nothing held back, the whole creature given to God. And the grain offering, the fruit of human labor brought in gratitude, fine flour and oil, no leaven, no honey, but always salt. One speaks of total surrender. The other speaks of thankful dedication of our daily work. Together they say something the modern heart needs to hear: God wants all of you, and He wants the ordinary stuff of your life offered up to Him too.

And here is the thread that runs straight from these altars to a hill outside Jerusalem. These offerings could never finally take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). They were shadows, rehearsals, fingers pointing forward to a better sacrifice. When you watch the smoke rise from the burnt offering, you are watching a picture of the One who would offer Himself wholly to God on our behalf, the One who needs no repetition because His one offering was enough. We do not bring bulls and lambs anymore. But Leviticus still has everything to teach us about how holy God is, how costly forgiveness is, and how completely Christ has secured what these altars only foreshadowed.

Group Discussion: Leviticus opens with God speaking to invite a redeemed people near to Himself through prescribed offerings. As a class, why do you think God refused to let Israel approach Him in whatever way seemed good to them, and what does that insistence teach us about the nature of acceptable worship today?

Personal Reflection: The burnt offering held nothing back; the whole animal was given to God. Where in your own life are you still offering God a portion while quietly keeping the rest for yourself?

Read Leviticus 1:1–2:16

Study Questions

1. In Leviticus 1:1–2, God calls to Moses and gives the offerings as something Israel is to bring when they 'draw near.' What does this opening reveal about who initiates worship and on whose terms a sinful people may approach a holy God?
2. The worshiper laid his hand on the head of the burnt offering (1:4) and it was 'accepted for him to make atonement.' What would it stir in you to lay your hand on a living creature knowing it would die in your place, and how does that act expose what sin actually costs?
3. The burnt offering was wholly consumed on the altar, none of it eaten by the worshiper (1:9). What is God teaching about total surrender and the wholeness of true devotion through an offering that holds back nothing?
4. Leviticus allowed a bull, a sheep or goat, or even turtledoves depending on what the worshiper could afford (1:3, 1:10, 1:14). How does this provision speak to you about a God who makes a way for the poor as well as the rich to come to Him?
5. The grain offering was made of fine flour, oil, and frankincense, the fruit of human labor, and a memorial portion was burned while the rest went to the priests (2:1–3). What does it mean to bring God the work of your hands as worship, and what does this offering add to the picture begun by the burnt offering?

6. The grain offering was to contain no leaven and no honey, but every offering was to be seasoned with salt, the 'salt of the covenant' (2:11, 2:13). What might God be asking you to remove from your offering to Him, and what might the enduring salt of the covenant be asking you to preserve?
7. These offerings produced 'a sweet savor unto the Lord' (1:9, 2:2). What does it mean that an act of worship can be genuinely pleasing and acceptable to God, and how does that guard us from thinking all worship is automatically welcome to Him?
8. Atonement in chapter 1 comes only through the death of a substitute, blood sprinkled on the altar (1:5). As you sit with that, where are you tempted to think you can make yourself acceptable to God by effort, sincerity, or good intentions rather than by a substitute?
9. Hebrews 10:1–14 says the law was 'a shadow of good things to come' and that these repeated sacrifices could never take away sin, but that Christ offered one sacrifice for sins forever. How do the burnt and grain offerings foreshadow Christ, and why does His once-for-all offering make any return to animal sacrifice both unnecessary and unthinkable?
10. Looking back across these two chapters, the whole animal given up and the daily labor offered in thanks, name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to reshape what you surrender to God and how you worship Him with your ordinary life.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 10:1–14, where the repeated sacrifices are called a shadow and Christ offers one sacrifice forever; Romans 12:1, where we present our bodies a living sacrifice as our reasonable service; Ephesians 5:2, where Christ gave Himself an offering and a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor; 1 Peter 2:5, where we are a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ; Genesis 22:1–14, where Abraham offers Isaac and God provides the substitute lamb

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