



The Burnt Offering

Bible Basics
8 November 2025

‘Now the LORD called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them’ (Lev. 1:1–2).

- After redeeming His people Israel out of Egypt, God said to Moses in the wilderness, *‘And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them’* (Ex. 25:8).
- At the end of Exodus, *‘the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle’* (40:34) and immediately after that, at the start of Leviticus, He spoke to Moses *‘from the tabernacle of **meeting**’* (1:1).
- He desired to meet with His people and have fellowship with them, and expected them to respond to Him ... but how?.

‘When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD ...’ (Lev. 1:2).

- By offering sacrifices. This wasn’t new — Cain and Abel had brought Him offerings some 2,500 years earlier: *‘Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his **offering**’* (Gen. 4:4). Abel’s was the first burnt offering in Scripture.
- The idea underlying this was that the offerer voluntarily sent a **sweet-smelling savour** up to God by **sacrificing** something **suitable** to Him (see 8:20) — he approached Him in the value of the offering.
- Of course, God saw in the offerings He accepted a picture of the one perfect offering of His Son, the Lord Jesus, on the cross.
- There’s no mention of non-sweet-smelling sin and trespass offerings until the law was given (see Rom. 5:13).

‘you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock’ (Lev. 1:2).

- Under the law, the five principal offerings — burnt, meal (grain), peace, sin and trespass — were offered on the brazen (copper) altar in the court of the tabernacle (Ex. 38:30). This was called *‘the altar of burnt offering’* (30:28), indicating the burnt offering was foundational to the others as well as the first one.*
- Our verse in Leviticus suggests a burnt offering was normally an animal from the herd (vs. 4–9) or the flock (vs. 10–13) and that offering a bird (vs. 14–17) was a special provision — perhaps for those not able to bring an animal, though Scripture does not say so explicitly (as it does in the case of the sin offering, 5:7; 14:22).

*Not all sin offerings, but peace offerings were actually burned on the burnt offering itself (Lev. 3:5).

‘If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish ...’ (Lev. 1:3).

- The word for ‘*burnt*’ here means the whole offering ascended to God — it was wholly for His pleasure (peace offerings were eaten by the priests, the offerer and his family and friends) but more on this later.
- An animal of the herd, being large, domesticated and clean, was particularly suitable for a burnt offering.
- In keeping with the voluntary nature of the offering, the offerer had liberty to select which kind of herd animal he sacrificed.
- But it must be a **male** and **without defect** because in Scripture the male is responsible to act for God (as Christ did) and only an animal in the finest condition would be suitable for Him.
- Of course, our Lord Jesus is the only true burnt offering.

‘at the entrance of the tent of meeting shall he present it, for his acceptance before Jehovah’
(Lev. 1:3, JND).

- The offerer came to the door of God’s dwelling — the tabernacle — bringing his offering with him so God could **receive him without any reservation**.
- This offering showed he not only appreciated God’s blessings but wanted to enjoy His presence with a real sense in his soul that He was **accepted** there.
- Ephesians 1:6 tells us — believers after the cross — that we **are ‘accepted in the Beloved’**. What a reason to *‘offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name’* (Heb. 13:15)!

‘Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him’ (Lev. 1:4).

- In putting his hand on the head of the burnt offering, the offerer **identified** with it in its acceptability to God (in contrast to the sin offering) — this covered (atoned for) him in His sight (see Gen. 3:21).
- By believing on the Lord Jesus, we have identified ourselves with Him in all His preciousness to God, and this has been transferred to us — not because He has borne our sins (that’s the sin offering) — but because He has **glorified God about the whole question of sin**.
- This would be true even if no one believed on Him, but because — in grace — we have, we know He is *‘the propitiation’* — God-glorifying sacrifice — *‘for our sins’* (1 John 4:10), and *‘as he is, so are we in this world’* (v. 17). What wonderful assurance this gives us!

Consider these scriptures where nothing is said about us, only Him:

- *‘When He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, **‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God’**”* (Heb. 10:5–7, quoted from Ps. 40).
- *‘**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work**’* (John 4:34).
- *‘**Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again**’* (John 10:17, compare v. 11).
- *‘**Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?**’* (John 18:11).
- *‘He humbled Himself and became **obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross**’* (Phil. 2:8).

These words of C H Mackintosh are very helpful:

‘It is most needful, in studying the doctrine of the burnt offering, to bear in mind that the grand point set forth therein is not the meeting of the sinner's need, but the presentation to God of that which was infinitely acceptable to Him. Christ, as foreshadowed by the burnt offering, is not for the sinner's conscience, but for the heart of God. Further, the cross, in the burnt offering, is not the exhibition of the exceeding hatefulness of sin, but of Christ's unshaken and unshakable devotedness to the Father. Neither is it the scene of God's out-poured wrath on Christ the sin-bearer; but of the Father's unmingled complacency in Christ, the voluntary and most fragrant sacrifice. Finally, *‘atonement’*, as seen in the burnt offering, is not merely commensurate with the claims of man's conscience, but with the intense desire of the heart of Christ, to carry out the will and establish the counsels of God — a desire which stopped not short of surrendering up His spotless, precious life, as *‘a voluntary offering’* of *‘sweet savour’* to God’ (*Notes on the Book of Leviticus*).

‘He shall kill the bull before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar’ (Lev. 1:5).

Rightly we sing:

‘Lord of life, to death made subject,
Blessor, yet a curse once made;
Of Thy Father's heart the object,
Yet in depths of anguish laid:
Thee we gaze on,
Thee recall,
Bearing here our sorrows all.’

by Richard Holden, hymn 134 verse 3 in Spiritual Songs

- The offerer entered into the truth that the animal must die for him by killing it himself, but then the priests took over as those who knew what needed to be done to offer it in a way that pleased God.
- They started by sprinkling the blood, which speaks of the life given, not around the base of the altar as in the case of the sin offering (Lev. 4:7), but ***on*** it — everything is **elevated** here though it is connected with sin and death.
- Believers today are offerers *and* priests (1 Pet. 2:5). The precious blood of Christ redeems us to God (1:18–21) **for His pleasure** so that we can join with Him in His enjoyment of His Son's perfections, who obediently suffered the penalty a righteous God must inflict for sin.
- Again, it's '*by the door of the tabernacle of meeting*' for '*the blood of Jesus*' gives us title to enter God's very presence (Heb. 10:19). What was closed to an Israelite then is open to us now.

‘And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces’ (Lev. 1:6).

- The act of skinning or flaying removed the animal’s skin so that every part of it — within and without — could be cut up and inspected.
- Reading Scripture, we find only perfection in our Lord. The Psalms in particular, reveal His **thoughts and feelings** — *‘I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart’* (Ps. 40:8).
- The gospels record that people *‘ marvelled at the gracious **words** which proceeded out of His mouth’* (Luke 4:22, see also John 7:46) and said, *‘He has **done** all things well’* (Mark 7:37). The repentant robber declared, *‘this Man has done nothing wrong’* (Luke 23:41).
- Our Lord is *‘full of grace and truth’* (John 1:14).

‘The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire’ (Lev. 1:7).

- The priests prepared the altar for burning the sacrifice.
- The **fire** symbolises God’s unerring judgment; the **wood** hints at the cross of shame — *‘the tree’* (1 Pet. 2:24) — on which our Lord suffered excruciating spiritual, mental and physical agony yet glorified God in every respect (compare Gen. 22:7).
- As we shall see, the judgment did not consume evil and the suffering did not provoke it for there was none in Him — only perfect goodness: *‘the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do’* (John 14:30–31, see also 1 Pet. 2:22–23).

‘Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar’ (Lev. 1:8).

- Applying this to our Lord, **the head** reminds us that He *‘knew no sin’* (2 Cor. 5:21).
- **The fat** — the word used for it here is unique in Scripture and refers to it in its highest quality — speaks of His spiritual energy in doing God’s will: *‘I do always those things that please Him’* (John 8:29).
- He **knew** God’s will — *‘He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned’* — and He **did** it perfectly: *‘that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary ...’* (Isa. 50:4–9).

‘but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water’
(Lev. 1:9).

- The **entrails** remind us that our Lord’s inner exercises were holy: *‘in Him there is no sin’* (1 John 3:5); the **legs** that He *‘committed no sin’* (1 Pet. 2:22) but *‘went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him’* (Acts 10:38).
- The **washing** can be seen in two ways:
 - 1) it brought the sacrificial animal into conformity with the One it symbolised, of whom we hear it said: *‘You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness’* (Heb. 1:9);
 - 2) it illustrates the fact that His every desire and movement was governed by God’s Word whatever the temptation and provocation — three times He said to the devil, *‘It is written ...’* (Matt. 4:4, 6, 7).

‘And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD’ (Lev. 1:10).

- The word ‘burn’ here means to burn as **incense**, emphasising the very special way this offering was sweet-smelling to God.
- The Lord Jesus is the measure of our acceptance before God according to the glory He gave Him about the whole question of sin when everything depended on Him, all was against Him and He was completely alone in devotedly offering **Himself**: *‘Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour’* (Eph. 5:2).
- This is the very highest aspect of our Lord’s work on the cross. May we give expression to it in our worship, especially each Lord’s day when we *‘proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes’* (1 Cor. 11:23).

Three types of burnt offering in this chapter

- If offering an **animal from the herd** symbolises our Lord as bringing glory and pleasure to God, offering a **sheep** or **goat** (vs. 10–13, self-surrender, substitution) may refer to what He suffered in doing this (e.g. the north speaks of judgment, v. 11) and offering a **turtle dove** or **young pigeon** (vs. 14–17) to Him doing it as *‘the second Man ... from heaven’* (1 Cor.15:47) and in love for us (Songs 1:15).
- There is a greater sense of the truth of the burnt offering in the first type than the second and third (the following chart shows the positive aspects unique to it, highlighted in yellow). The third has features that definitely fall short (highlighted in blue on the chart).
- And yet, God calls all three: *‘an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD’* (vs. 9, 13 & 17). What grace, and what an incentive to *‘let the word of the Christ dwell in [us] richly’* (Col. 3:16).

Comparing the three types of burnt offering

	A burnt sacrifice of the herd		... of the flocks		... of birds
v. 3	... let him offer a male without blemish; at the entrance of the tent of meeting shall he present it, for his acceptance before Jehovah.	v. 10	... of the sheep or of the goats—as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male without blemish.	v. 14	... he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or young pigeons
v. 4	Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.				
v. 5	He shall kill the bull before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting.	v. 11	He shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle its blood all around on the altar.	v. 15	The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off its head, and burn [it] on the altar; its blood shall be drained out at the side of the altar.
v. 6	he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.	v. 12	And he shall cut it into its pieces, and its head, and its fat; and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire which is on the altar;	v. 16	And he shall remove its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar on the east side, into the place for ashes.
v. 7	The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire.				
v. 8	Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar;				
v. 9	but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD	v. 13	but he shall wash the entrails and the legs with water. Then the priest shall bring it all and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.	v. 17	Then he shall split it at its wings, but shall not divide it completely; and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD

The law of the burnt offering

- The law of the offerings in Leviticus 6:8–7:38 contains additional provisions, particularly for the priests.
- Regarding the burnt offering it says: *‘And the priest who offers anyone's burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has offered’* (7:8).
- We saw already that the whole offering ascended to God but now we learn that the skin was reserved for the priest who sprinkled the animal's blood on the altar, cut it up and burned it there — he got a real benefit from such high and holy service.
- We can apply this to ourselves as holy priests (1 Pet. 2:5) by saying that although presenting the Lord Jesus to God is firstly for His glory and pleasure, doing it will give us a real sense of the wonderful fact He sees us in Christ (compare Gen. 3:21).

The continual burnt offering (Ex. 28:38–46).

- There was a **continual burnt offering** for the people of Israel as a whole. This consisted of two lambs: one offered in the morning, the other in the evening.
- The law of the offering (Lev. 6:8–13) stipulated that this was to be on the hearth of the altar *‘all night unto the morning’* and the fire was to be kept burning: *‘it shall never go out’*.
- This is a picture of Christ as a sweet savour to God on Israel’s behalf even in the ‘nighttime’ of her unbelief. In the future — *‘the morning’* — when He delivers the remnant from their enemies, it will be clear that He has preserved her and that her acceptance and blessing are based entirely on the work of her Messiah on the cross.
- As the assembly we have the assurance in our hearts that our Lord will bring us into His Father’s house on the same basis (John 14:1–4).

A wonderful instance of the burnt offering

- *‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a **burnt offering** on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’ (Gen. 22:2).*
- *‘[Abraham] split the wood for the **burnt offering**, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him’ and ‘took the wood of the **burnt offering** and laid it on Isaac his son’ (vs. 3, 6).*
- *‘Isaac ... said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a **burnt offering**?” (v. 7). Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a **burnt offering**”’ (vs. 7, 8, see also v. 14).*
- *‘Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a **burnt offering** instead of his son’ (v. 13).*