

The Burnt Offerings

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The word of God is always teaching, if a man would seek it, study it, hear it, meditate upon it, and live it. Lessons upon lessons, precepts, principles, types and anti-types, illustrations, instruction, and wisdom from on High await the diligent student of God's word. God has always instructed man on how he is to walk, worship, and receive atonement. As Christians we can glean much from looking back to that which was written before (Rom. 15:4). Understanding that the new covenant is far superior to the old, we should grow in our understanding and appreciation of God's wonderful scheme of redemption, and His means of atonement. The book of Leviticus provides detailed instructions set forth to Israel by God regarding laws of holiness, sacrifice, and worship. Among the various offerings commanded by God to Israel are burnt offerings. We read about burnt offerings in chapter 1 and chapter 6 of Leviticus. Let's briefly explore the purpose, details, and prophetic significance of the burnt offerings.

THE PURPOSE OF BURNT OFFERINGS

Burnt offerings (that which ascends) were performed daily, weekly, and during special festivals. The burnt offering was associated with atonement. Leviticus 1:4 states, "Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him."

This practice showed a desire to cover the worshiper's sins and establish reconciliation between the worshiper and God. Burnt offerings were an act of worship. The offering of the entire animal, completely consumed by fire, symbolized the worshiper's devotion, dedication, and surrender to God. The burning of the sacrifice, where no part of the animal was kept for the worshiper, illustrated the complete consecration of life and resources to God. The burnt offering was considered a sweet savor unto the Lord (Leviticus 1:9). The burnt offering, performed according to God's instructions was received by God as acceptable worship.

THE DETAILS OF BURNT OFFERINGS

God is approachable, but only on His terms. The process of offering a burnt sacrifice was very specific. God is Holy, and there is the proper way to approach Him. Depending on the economic status of the worshiper, different animals could be offered as burnt offerings. A bull, for those who could afford a more expensive offering, a male sheep or goat, and turtledoves or pigeons for those that were poor. Each animal had to be without blemish and offered voluntarily. Once the sacrificial animal was selected, the worshiper was required to lay their hands on the animal's head. This action was symbolic of the worshiper's sin and guilt being transferred to the innocent animal.

The animal bore the punishment that the worshiper deserved. Next, the worshiper was responsible for killing the animal. The shedding of blood was central to the burnt offering, it represented the giving of life and pointed to the gravity of sin, which leads to death. Once the animal was slaughtered, the priest took over the offering. The priest would sprinkle the blood of the animal around the altar (Leviticus 1:5), cut the animal into pieces as instructed, arrange the pieces of the animal in the order as instructed on the altar, wash the inwards and legs in water and completely burn all on the altar. If the offering was of fowls, alternative specific instructions were to be followed by the priests.