

Types of Sacrifice in the Old Testament

How they Each Work, and How Some of them Point to Christ

J. Webb Mealy

Types of Offerings

The Fellowship Offering

When you're in good standing with God, you can bring a **Fellowship Offering** (sometimes called a **Peace Offering**), which is a flawless animal from your flock or herd. You slaughter the animal, and the priests splash its blood on the hot sides of the altar of sacrifice (essentially a big barbecue pit), so that it runs down into a catchment trough at the base of the altar, and the priests burn up the fatty portions of the animal (Lev. 3:1-17). The aroma of the drying blood and the burning fat goes up to God as a "pleasing aroma." The meat of the animal, with the exception of the breast and the right thigh, which are given to the priests, as food support for them in their ministry, is for you and your family to feast on and enjoy in the presence of the LORD (Lev. 7:11-16, 28-36). That is the normal sacrifice. It's a special ritual meal a little like a Thanksgiving or Easter dinner, a special meal that you have with God.

The Thank Offering

A **Thank Offering** is a special kind of **Fellowship Offering**, with a distinctive added procedure that involves offering a variety of kinds of bread, which the priests eat:

Lev. 7:11 These are the regulations for the **Fellowship Offering** anyone may present to the LORD: ¹² If they offer it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering they are to offer thick loaves made without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, thin loaves made without yeast and brushed with oil, and thick loaves of the finest flour well-kneaded and with oil mixed in. ¹³ Along with their **Fellowship Offering** of thanksgiving they are to present an offering with thick loaves of bread made with yeast. ¹⁴ They are to bring one of each kind as an offering, a contribution to the LORD; it belongs to the priest who splashes the blood of the **Fellowship Offering** against the altar.

The Sin Offering

If you realize at any point that you have failed to fulfill your obligations to God, and you sense that you are out of right standing with God, you can make restitution to

God with a **Sin Offering** (Lev. 4:2). You, as the person who offers it, go through exactly the same procedure as with the **Fellowship Offering**, but there are two differences in the procedure after you have slaughtered the animal: 1. In this case you and your family don't get to eat the offering. God gets the pleasing aroma of the fat as before, but only the priests get to eat the meat (Lev. 5:13). 2. A small amount of the animal's blood is ceremonially dabbed or sprinkled with the priest's finger on the horns of the altar, and the rest of the blood is poured in the catchment trough at the base of the altar (Lev. 4:27-35). This trough is the same final location of the blood of the **Fellowship Offering**, which, when splashed on the sides of the altar, also runs down into the catchment trough.

The Guilt Offering

A **Guilt Offering** is the same as a **Sin Offering** except that it is the specific offering called for if you have failed some civic duty, rather than a purely religious one. For example, see Lev. 6:1-7; 7:7. There is some ambiguity between the **Guilt Offering** and the **Sin Offering**. In certain texts it is hard to tell the difference in their function and application. Conceptually, the **Sin Offering** and the **Guilt Offering** share the function of *cleansing*—the blood of the animal that is offered *cleanses the altar*, and it *cleanses the person or persons* on whose behalf it is offered (Heb. 9:13-14, 19-22; 10:11-14; compare Lev. 4:6-7, 17-18, 25, 30, 34; Lev. 14:12-18, 25-28). In general, sprinkled (or daubed) blood, like sprinkled water, is understood to ceremonially cleanse and make holy (Exod. 29:21; Heb. 9:13-14; compare the use of sprinkled water in Num. 8:7; 19:18; Ezek. 36:25).

The Burnt Offering

A **Burnt Offering** is special in that the intention of the person who offers it is to give a gift wholly to God, without getting any benefit back. Thus, in distinction from the case of the **Fellowship Offering**, I and my family do not eat it. The burnt offering is for God alone. It's a special gift. See Lev. 1:1-17.

Things to Understand about Sacrifices

First, the **Fellowship Offering** is no more or less than a shared meal between the person who offers (and their family) and God. Thus this kind of sacrifice contains no hint at all of some kind of penal substitution on the part of the animal that is offered and eaten. The whole basis of this offering is that *you are in good standing with God, and you are invited to share a celebratory meal with God* (see similarly Rev. 3:20). Secondly, with this as the background, the **Sin Offering** functions as an *act of restitution*, an act of making amends for lapses in religious duty. You give God an out-and-out gift, from which you get no benefit in return, since you (and your family) do not eat it. That gift makes amends for your failure in the past to give

God an offering that you were supposed to make. Always, without exception in Scripture, the function of the **Sin Offering** is to offer a pleasing gift to God, *not* to offer God something to punish or take his wrath out on (compare Lev. 4:27-31; Eph. 5:2).

This background makes Christ's self-offering on the cross the most amazing gift in all of creation. We humans, stuck in our self-imposed state of alienation and hostility towards God, *did not have it in us to bring an offering to make amends for our sins* (Col. 1:21-22). But Christ, facing the very worst of our sinfulness and hostility towards God, broke the power of our sin and hostility by forgiving and offering the amends for it on our behalf, *right in the midst of its all-out expression*. And God the Father, looking upon Christ's obedience and love, accepted his amends on our behalf. Christ's goodness and obedience atones for, makes amends for, our wickedness and disobedience (Heb. 5:7-10; 10:1-10). Christ's gift of himself does not reconcile God to us, but reconciles us to God (compare Zech. 12:10–13:1; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Col. 1:21-22).