

February 22

Portions of Leviticus 3 - 7, and Numbers 15

### Fellowship and Sin Offerings

Yesterday in our reading from Leviticus we learned something about two of the sacrifices mentioned in Numbers: the burnt offering and the grain offering. Today we want to focus briefly on the fellowship offering and the sin offering.

The fellowship offering, like the burnt and grain offerings, was a voluntary act of worship. Any animal without defect from the herd or flock was acceptable. This offering was also called the 'peace offering' and in this sacrifice, after a portion of the animal had been offered up to the Lord, the remainder was returned and was consumed in a festive fellowship meal with his family.

The reasons for making this offering could be fairly diverse. You might want to praise God, or thank Him for blessings conferred, or perhaps you wanted to fulfill a particular vow, or you just wanted to express your special devotion to God. The one thing that was particularly significant about this offering is that, unlike the sin offering that we will discuss a little later, this was a sacrifice of rejoicing - a sacrifice of praise. The people of Israel were to rejoice when they brought this offering to the Lord. There is a little chorus we sometimes sing, "We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord." That was the fellowship offering. In Leviticus, this is the third offering mentioned. In Numbers 7 it was the last one mentioned, and in the instructions to the priests in Leviticus 7 it is also the last mentioned. This is significant only because the suggestion has been made that in the case of multiple sacrifices, the fellowship offering would probably have been the last, leaving the worshippers in a final mode of joy for God's goodness.

The next offering we need to understand is the sin offering, or as some have preferred to call it, the 'purification offering' because purification was the main idea behind this sacrifice.

Before I get into explaining sin offerings, have you ever looked up the original Greek or Hebrew definition for sin? That Hebrew word, for "sin" and the Greek word that matches it, both mean to "fall short" of the mark of perfection that God lays before all of His children. Sin, then, does not necessarily have to involve willful rebellion against the laws and standards that God has laid out for us. There are, in fact, other words that the Bible has for intentional and willful violations. To "sin" just means to "fall short." Now think about that for a minute and it will probably put a whole new light on the prophets' declaration that *"All of our righteousness is as filthy rags"* - because it surely means that even the good things that we attempt, to the extent that they fall short of the mark of God's perfection, are properly called "sin."

As I said, purification was the main idea behind the sacrifice of the sin offering. Before the Levites could serve as aides to the priests in the work of the Tabernacle,

they, like the furnishings in the Tabernacle and the priests for whom they worked, had to be purified. Sin made them unclean and that sin had to be dealt with before they could serve the Lord acceptably.

Unlike some of the other offerings, the sin offering was mandatory - not optional or voluntary. If you sinned, atonement had to be made for that sin. Now, and this is both interesting and a little bit frightening, the emphasis throughout these sacrifices is clearly upon sin that was committed 'unintentionally.' There is an understanding here that the great majority of sins committed are perpetrated in ignorance or at least in an unpremeditated fashion.

It is further important to understand that the idea of willful, intentional sin does not even seem to enter into the consciousness of the 4th chapter of the Book of Leviticus. If unintentional and unpremeditated sin has the effect of breaking our fellowship with God and polluting our churches and our land, think what conscious, willful sin must do! We need to understand that sin is a very serious thing, much more serious than most modern-day Christians would ever stop to think.

One final thought about all of this. It should be obvious, but sometimes the obvious needs stating and even repeating. Unintentional "sins" are "real sins," and therefore need to be repented of just as much as the more hideous, willful ones. Sometimes we want to say that things are mistakes, but not sins, because we didn't mean to violate the law of God. That is not Biblically correct. It is never enough to say to God - or to one another for that matter - "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that" and then assume everything is okay. A spirit of repentance, and the words, "Please forgive me," are necessary whether or not the sin was intentional.

That about wraps it up for today. I don't know about you but after plowing through these exhaustive passages on offerings I am so thankful for Jesus and his sacrifice for us 2000 years ago. Because of him we don't have to go through all the Old Testament rules and regulations for atoning for our sin...Jesus' blood covered over our ALL of the ways we have fallen short of him, past present and future. We no longer live under the law but under grace! This is incredibly GOOD NEWS!