

February 23

Parts of Leviticus 5-7, 22-23, Numbers 28, Deuteronomy 21:1-9, Numbers 6

Today we will be wrapping up the discussion on offerings.

Our reading began with a description of the guilt offering, sometimes called a trespass offering. The appropriate animal for a guilt offering was a ram or a lamb. The priests were entitled to keep and consume a portion of the meat of the sin and guilt offerings. Now the sin and guilt offerings are often confused with each other. Certainly there is an overlapping of the two, just as there are points of similarity between most of the sacrifices. The most critical point of difference here, however, falls upon the fact that the guilt offering is appropriate whenever the issue of restitution is involved. When a person has sinned against the Lord or another in the taking or unlawful use of material property, restitution becomes appropriate, and the guilt offering is the appropriate sacrifice, accompanied by the restoration of that which was taken, or an equivalent amount plus 20% more. That is the "fine," if you will. The emphasis, even in this sacrifice, falls upon unintentional or unpremeditated sin, but just perhaps the language of chapter 6:1-7 is broad enough to also include the idea of intentional sin. In that case, the other name of this sacrifice, the "Trespass Offering," becomes even more understandable, because that is what a "trespass" is - an act of stepping across a set (and usually known) boundary line into the realm of forbidden evil. May God today forgive us of both our sins and our trespasses.

I also believe that restitution plus 20% is a great idea when something has been stolen. I first ran across this principle reading the Bible in college. A couple of buddies and I had stolen 2 street signs during my High School days. I stole Mark Avenue and Ashton Ct. So, I found out how much they cost and went back to the city government and paid it...plus 20%.

They did not know what to do with me! I was afraid they might press charges, but they didn't! the lady called out "hey! Marget check this out!". It totally made their day AND let me walk away with a clean conscience.

Special offerings

A few more special offerings mentioned today deal with the frequency of the offerings - The Sabbath offering and the monthly offerings. Why were these burnt offerings important? Because the primary purpose of these regularly prescribed offerings is worship and the message conveyed over and over again is that God desires the worship of His people. In a day and age in which many (maybe most) people come to church in order to have their needs met, it is a healthy reminder that God's idea is that when we come to church, it is primarily for the purpose of worshipping Him. Our sweet smelling offerings are not burned upon an altar, but our prayers and hymns and praises are also a sweet smelling savor to God. Next Sunday when you come to church, remember the purpose of the sacrifices, and let that thought drive you to worship.

Before we leave the subject of sacrifices, I wanted to mention a few more things. One concerns the cost of all these sacrifices. We noted a while ago that there were some economic options in the mandatory sin offerings. If you were poor or very poor, you could bring a less expensive offering, but whether rich or poor, the sacrifices were costly to the individuals who brought them. If you think about how many offerings an individual might conceivably bring in the course of a year, you begin to realize that the Israelites' system of worship was costly to them - and they believed that that was as it should be. There is a very striking incident, which we will later investigate in the life of David. When the king wanted to make a sacrifice to the Lord, a generous subject offered to donate a yoke of oxen for the ceremony. David's response was revealing. He refused the generous gift with this comment: "*I will not give to the Lord that which costs me nothing.*" The thought that lies behind that remark, and the whole Old Testament concept of worship, is that worship is costly, and by giving of ourselves and of our substance in the worship of God, we demonstrate our commitment to Him. To worship God without the giving of our substance would be to the minds of both Old Testament and New Testament believers an exercise in futility.

Next, you need to see that, from a certain point of view, the giving of all of these instructions regarding the frequency of the sacrifices would have been a reassuring thing to Joshua and the people of Israel. I did a little arithmetic. Every year, the priests were going to have to sacrifice a minimum of 113 bulls, 32 rams, and 1086 lambs and offer more than a ton of flour and a thousand bottles of oil and wine. And that doesn't account for any individual sin and guilt offerings or voluntary grain and fellowship offerings. Why would this be reassuring? Because, if God expected all these offerings, then He must be planning a very prosperous future for them.

I am glad that God has a future in store for all of us too! Let me close with Aaron's benediction that you read today.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."