

10

SESSION TEN

Atonement Sacrifices (Part 1)

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we focus on the first three kinds of sacrifices described in Leviticus: the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering. The burnt offering was for the removal of the people's guilt before God; the grain offering restored Israel to serve God and neighbor; and the peace offering was for reconciliation between God and His people. Because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, we celebrate the removal of our guilt before God, the freedom to serve God on His mission, and the restoration of our relationship with God.

SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 1:3-9; 2:1-3; 3:1-5

THE POINT

Atonement is needed for removal of guilt, restoration of service, and reconciliation with God.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

When Marcus Luttrell joined the Navy in 1999, he knew he wanted to be a SEAL—the best of the best in the U.S. military. He reached that goal in 2001. Just a few years later, in June of 2005, Luttrell was sent on a mission to kill or capture a notorious terrorist leader. Along with three other SEALs, he found himself in an ambush vastly outnumbered by enemy combatants. Twenty-four hours later, he was the only member of his team still alive. Behind enemy lines and outnumbered nearly 200 to one, Luttrell barely managed to escape thanks to being taken in by a Pashtun tribe who put him into hiding. While a large enemy force searched for Marcus, news of what happened reached his fellow soldiers at the base.

The Navy SEALs immediately mounted a rescue operation. Sixteen special forces soldiers left to rescue Luttrell, yet not one returned alive. They all gave their lives in order to rescue him. This desperate battle to save a comrade led to the largest loss of special forces troops in a single event in the history of Naval Special Warfare. Eventually, Marcus was rescued and returned home safely.

- **What sacrificial act did these special forces team members make for their country as well as for Marcus?**
- **Would you have been willing to do the same? Why or why not?**
- **When someone gives his or her life to save another, we often refer to this as the ultimate sacrifice. In what way did Jesus make the ultimate sacrifice for us?**

The men who volunteered to rescue Marcus did so knowing that they may have to give their lives so someone else could live. They gave their lives in order to allow someone else to return safely home, which is exactly what Marcus did.¹

The same could be said about Jesus when He embarked on His rescue mission for us. He gave His life in order to rescue us from the enemy. As He gave His life, it released us from the slavery of sin and enabled us to serve Him. The beauty of Jesus' rescue is that we can now live for Him!

Option 2

Invite students to call out names of movies where one of the characters risks his or her life to save others. (for example: *Armageddon*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Captain America*, *The Avengers*, *Lone Survivor*)

- **What made these people willing to sacrifice their lives for someone else?**
- **What did their actions say about their character and their love for people?**
- **Does sacrificing for others always involve being willing to give your life for them? Explain.**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Atonement is needed for removal of guilt, restoration of service, and reconciliation with God.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Aaron:** older brother of Moses; chosen by God to serve as Moses' spokesman and later to become Israel's first high priest

PLOT

As we saw in the previous session, the tabernacle in the wilderness was the place where God's presence was manifested among His people. Although it was extravagant, the tabernacle was not a showplace to be admired for its beauty. It was a place for serious work to be done. The large bronze altar at the entrance was the place where slaughtered animals would be sacrificed as burnt offerings.

After the account of the tabernacle's construction and God's glory filling the tent (Exodus 40), Scripture gives us a detailed account of the various animal sacrifices to be offered there (Leviticus 1–7). The Lord laid out specific instructions for this complicated system of sacrifices. Each of these five sacrifices served a slightly different purpose, but together they provide a biblical picture of atonement.

In this session, we focus on the first three kinds of sacrifices: the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering. The burnt offering was for the removal of the people's guilt before God; the grain offering restored Israel to serve God and neighbor; and the peace offering was for reconciliation between God and His people. Because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, we celebrate the removal of our guilt before God, the freedom to serve God on His mission, and the restoration of our relationship with God.

TIMELINE

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)

The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

MOSES' FAREWELL ADDRESS

Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel.

THE BURNT OFFERING

The first kind of animal sacrifice that God specified to be presented to Him was called the burnt offering. Perhaps its name was derived from the fact that it was the only offering that was completely burned up, leaving nothing.

Here is the way the Lord instructed Moses to present this offering in Leviticus 1:

If his gift is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to bring an unblemished male. He must bring it to the entrance to the tent of meeting so that he may be accepted by the LORD. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering so it can be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. He is to slaughter the bull before the LORD; Aaron's sons the priests are to present the blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar that is at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then he must skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest will prepare a fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. Aaron's sons the priests are to arrange the pieces, the head, and the suet on top of the burning wood on the altar. The offerer must wash its entrails and shanks with water. Then the priest will burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Lev. 1:3-9)

The details for this offering seem bizarre. Most of us have never been around slaughtered animals; we are used to packaged meat in the supermarket aisle. But the Israelites were largely herdsmen. They were used to participating in the process of preparing animals for human consumption. Yet the requirements for the burnt offering were something the Israelites must have found quite distinctive.

Based on the previous verses, answer the following questions (*p. 66, PSG*):

- **Where was the animal to come from?** The animal was to come “from the herd” (1:3) and was therefore personal. A wild animal trapped by someone would be neither personal nor expensive.
- **What kind of animal was it to be?** A bull, ram, male goat, and birds were acceptable (1:5,10,14). Also, each animal had to be physically perfect. It must be “unblemished,” and therefore more costly than other similar animals (1:3).
- **Where was the animal to be offered?** At the required place, “the entrance to the tent of meeting” (1:3).
- **How was the offerer to identify with the animal?** The person making the offering was to “lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering” (1:4). The offerer was continually involved in the process of the offering, even though only the priests carried out certain functions (1:9).

- **How would the Lord respond to the offering?** The offering would be “a pleasing aroma to the LORD” (1:9). This implies that the Lord would find this sacrifice acceptable. The apostle Paul later used this language to refer to Jesus’ crucifixion as “a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God” (Eph. 5:2).

The burnt offering resulted in atonement for the offerer. This was a voluntary act of worship to atone for unintended sins. It was meant to express devotion and complete surrender to the Lord.

Share the following definition of *atonement*: To cover or cancel one’s sins. Atonement is motivated by the love of God. It occurs through the shedding of blood. The Old Testament shedding of animal blood pictured repentance, turning to God, and God’s forgiveness. It had to be repeated annually.²

Israelites could make the atonement offering at any time, but on one day of the year atonement came into sharper focus. This was the Day of Atonement (“Yom Kippur” in Hebrew), a solemn day every autumn described in detail in Leviticus 16; 23:26-32; and Numbers 29:7-11. This was the only time during the year when Israel’s high priest was allowed to enter the most holy place of the tabernacle (and later, the temple), where the Ark of the Covenant was. There, he would carry the blood of a specially slaughtered bull and “sprinkle some of the blood with his finger before the mercy seat seven times” (Lev. 16:14). On this day and through these rituals he would “make atonement for the Israelites once a year because of all their sins” (Lev. 16:34).

THE GRAIN OFFERING

The second offering God specified to Moses in Leviticus involved grain (or bread or flour). Its name was derived from the fact that it was the only offering that did not involve the death of an animal but rather grain from the earth, which was hand ground into “meal” or flour.

Here is the way the Lord instructed Moses to present this offering according to Leviticus 2:

When anyone presents a grain offering as a gift to the LORD, his gift must consist of fine flour. He is to pour olive oil on it, put frankincense on it, and bring it to Aaron’s sons the priests. The priest will take a handful of fine flour and oil from it, along with all its frankincense, and will burn this memorial portion of it on the altar, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD. But the rest of the grain offering will belong to Aaron and his sons; it is the holiest part of the fire offerings to the LORD. (Lev. 2:1-3)

As with the burnt offering, so with the grain offering: It was costly for the offerer, both in the ingredients and in the preparation. The Lord expected (and required) the very best from His people. However, unlike the burnt offering, which was

to be wholly consumed by fire, only a portion was burned up. Like the burnt offering, the part that was burned became “a pleasing aroma to the LORD.”

The purposes for this offering are not directly stated, yet we can make the following observations:

- The portion of the grain offering which was burned on the altar was the Lord’s “memorial portion” (2:2). This suggests that the offerer was asking God to remember him with favor.

- When the various grains began to be harvested, such as barley or wheat, the “firstfruits” were to be offered as a special grain offering (2:14-16). This suggests that thanksgiving to God for the harvest of the earth was part of the purpose (Num. 15:18-20).

- The grain offering, however, was offered voluntarily at other times. And because grain was the basis of the everyday diet of Israelites, it reminded people that everyday life was a gift from God.

Because people ate grain daily (in the form of flour baked into bread), the grain offering reminded the worshiper that their everyday life depended on God’s provision. Their ability to serve God—or even restoration to service after sin or sickness had disrupted service to Him—was demonstrated in this offering.

THE FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

Of all the sacrifices God specified in Leviticus, only the fellowship offering could be eaten by the offerer. This provides an important insight into what the sacrifice symbolized: reconciliation to God so that a person may enjoy fellowship with Him.

This offering has also been called the peace offering in English, because the Hebrew term for the offering is closely related to the Hebrew term for peace or wholeness. The offerer was to present before the priest a spotless cow, sheep, or goat.

Here is the way the Lord instructed Moses to present this offering according to Leviticus 3:

If his offering is a fellowship sacrifice, and he is presenting an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he must present one without blemish before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests will sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. He will present part of the fellowship sacrifice as a fire offering to the LORD: the fat surrounding the entrails, all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat on them at the loins; he will also remove the fatty lobe of the liver with the kidneys. Aaron’s sons will burn it on the altar along with the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Lev. 3:1-5)

TIMELINE

Beginning Spring 2016

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND

The spies deliver their report.

THE BRONZE SERPENT

The people look and are healed.

Unlike the burnt offering, only the fat and certain internal organs were burned. The offerer could eat the (cooked) meat of this sacrifice, but only on the day of the sacrifice or the next day (7:16-18). In other words, it was a kind of fellowship meal between God, the priests, and the offerer. The animal offered in sacrifice and then eaten symbolized that there was now a right relationship with God. (In most cultures, those who share a meal together do so only if a certain level of friendship is present; in this instance God was, as it were, inviting the worshiper to enjoy a friendship meal with Him.)

CHRIST CONNECTION

The New Testament writer of Hebrews, fully aware of the Old Testament sacrifices, explained how they were merely a shadow and a prefiguring of Christ's atoning death on the cross. The author explained it this way in Hebrews 9:

He [Jesus Christ] entered the most holy place once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb. 9:12)

The writer went to great lengths throughout Hebrews 9 to explain how Christ's death fulfilled the symbolism of Israel's rituals. He offered His own blood on behalf of others, not needing the blood of another because He had no sin. He entered the heavenly "most holy place" rather than the earthly copy of the most holy place. (See last week's study.) He obtained "eternal redemption" rather than a temporary atonement. He removed our guilt forever through the blood offering of Himself to God: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified. ... Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (Heb. 10:14,18).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Sacrifice

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to remove our sin "once and for all."

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is guilt a universal emotion? How can the feeling of guilt help us look outward to Christ instead of inward to ourselves?** *We all experience guilt because we have also experienced our consciences condemn us when we have sinned. However, instead of driving us further into ourselves in either despair or self-pity, the feeling of guilt directs our attention outward to Christ, knowing that in Him we can be free of guilt through His gift of salvation.*
- **As with the grain offering, what are some ways we can express our gratitude to God today?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are ways we express a restored relationship with others today?** *Restored relationships begin with seeing others as being image bearers of God, having the same value and deserving of the same respect we wish for ourselves. That can be expressed by getting to know them, showing acts of service toward them, removing any misconceptions and prejudices we may have regarding them, etc.*
- **Why do you think it was important for these offerings to be "costly?" What did the cost of the offering communicate about the seriousness of sin?** *The costly part of these sacrifices shows us the weightiness of sin, for if they were not costly, then sin wouldn't seem that big of a deal. Although the free gift of grace and salvation are not dependent upon any good works of ours, it is still costly grace since it cost the Son of God His life and requires us to put aside the deeds of the flesh in the act of discipleship.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Because of the once and for all sacrifice of Christ, we don't have to offer sacrifices to atone for ourselves. The offerings we make today aren't to appease our conscience or gain favor with God; instead, they're offerings made from gratitude and faith in response to His salvation.

- **What are some poor offerings that we often offer up to God in response to His great gift of salvation?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can a proper understanding of Jesus' sacrifice help motivate us to giving God our best in these areas?** *By recognizing what Christ has done for us in reconciling us back to God, we should be inclined to respond in such a way that expresses that gratitude in every area of life.*



HEART

The story that Leviticus tells of the different sacrifices can easily make today's reader squeamish. We are not accustomed to talking about killing animals, having them skinned, dismembered, and burned on altars. It is a sobering picture, one that sheds light on two essential things: the severity of our sin and our need for a Savior.

- **How do you think these sacrifices would have made the person offering them feel in regard to his or her sin?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What would it say about our sin if no sacrifice or Savior was needed?** *In essence, it would say that our sin is nothing to be taken seriously since God is evidently able to overlook it or sweep it under the rug.*



HANDS

In Romans 12:1-2, the apostle Paul advised believers to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice." All the animal sacrifices of the Israelites involved killing the animal—only for the grain offering was there no death. Thus, just as the grain offering was presented to God and then benefited others, so it is with believers. Jesus' followers are alive, presented to God, and then are able to serve others through the use of their unique spiritual gifts (12:3-8).

- **Why should Christ's sacrifice for us drive our desire to live for Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some spiritual gifts God has given you, and how can you use them to serve others?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #11 to the students, which contains an informational chart regarding the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

SOURCES

1. "Marcus Luttrell," MarcusLuttrell.com [online], [accessed 10 June 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.marcusluttrell.com.
2. "Atonement," *Holman Student Bible Dictionary* (Holman Bible Publishers: Nashville, TN, 1993), p. 36.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject