

BLOOD, GRAIN, & FIRE

SACRIFICE IN LEVITICUS

HOT

SHOTS

Blood, Grain, and Fire: Sacrifice in Leviticus

Written by Brent Niedergall

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Introduction

The title *Blood, Grain, and Fire* aims to capture the essence of the Old Testament sacrificial system. In this system, animals were put to death and burned on an altar along with grain. As foreign and unfamiliar as these sacrifices seem, they were attention-grabbing and sensory-laden acts of worship.

This study looks at the five offerings God prescribed for Israel in the Book of Leviticus. The working premise is that to best understand the final sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament, we must understand God's system of sacrifice in the Old Testament. Jesus said He came as the fulfillment to the Law and Prophets that looked forward to Him (Matt. 5:17). A survey of each sacrifice will introduce key doctrines of salvation that find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ's finished work.

Lesson Format

God's Word is the primary catalyst for our spiritual growth. As God teaches us His truth through His Word, He captivates our attention and opens our understanding. Just as Christ illustrated His teaching with tangible objects—a coin, a tree, or a sheep—you can use illustrations to cement biblical principles in your students' minds. Rather than simply talking about how God's Word reveals our heart (James 1:22–25), bring a mirror to show your students.

Hot Shots encourage interaction between students and teachers through exercises, handouts, and lively illustrations. Use the suggestions provided in each lesson, but feel free to enrich the lesson by using your own ideas.

Each Hot Shot lesson follows the same format.

- **The Warm Up** introduces the lesson topic to your students through activities such as songs, games, handouts, and discussion questions.
- **The Bridge** transitions from The Warm Up to the main text of Scripture for the lesson.
- **The Lesson** introduces and expands the main points. Throughout the lesson, you'll use handouts and discussion questions to help students internalize what they've heard.
- **The Closing** concludes the lesson by reviewing the main points and applying them to your students' lives.

Handouts may be copied for church use. They are also available as a free PDF download on the *Blood, Grain, and Fire* product page at positiveaction.org.

Before Each Lesson . . .

1. Read through the lesson and take note of the Objectives, Text, and any preparation needed for the creative teaching segments.
2. Adapt the lesson if necessary. Determine ahead of time if you'll need to modify teaching methods or activities to fit your equipment or facilities.
3. Plan your schedule for class time. Each lesson can be taught in 20–30 minutes, but feel free to shorten or lengthen the lesson to fit your needs.
4. Be enthusiastic! Excitement on your part will help cultivate your students' interest. If you don't feel that one of the teaching ideas or Warm Ups provided will excite your teens, modify it to fit your group.

Course Objectives

This study will . . .

- Explain the Old Testament sacrifices and how they help us better understand the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- Demonstrate that God is holy and that people are sinners in need of forgiveness.
- Identify the blessings of God's grace, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

Lesson Overview

Lesson 1—The Burnt Offering: Atonement

Text: Leviticus 1:1–9

- The theme of Leviticus is holiness.
- Sacrifice is God's method for dealing with sin.
- Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

Lesson 2—The Grain Offering: Providence

Text: Leviticus 2:1–3, 11–13

- The grain offering was a grateful response to God's providence.
- Believers can express their gratitude to God through thanksgiving, service, and love.
- Christians have a lasting relationship with God.

Lesson 3—The Peace Offering: Reconciliation

Text: Leviticus 3:1–5, 16–17

- The peace offering was a joyful celebration of God’s saving work.
- Reconciliation means we are now at peace with God instead of at war with Him.
- Every believer is an ambassador for Christ with a message of reconciliation.

Lesson 4—The Sin Offering: Forgiveness

Text: Leviticus 4:27–31; 5:1–6

- God’s holiness is a source of both great blessing and danger.
- Everyone is guilty of sin.
- God forgives sin on the basis of a blood sacrifice.

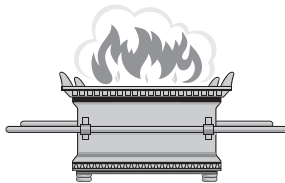
Lesson 5—The Guilt Offering: Repentance

Text: Leviticus 5:14–6:7

- God commands us to be faithful like Him.
- We must repent of our unfaithfulness to God.
- God forgives us when we confess our sin.

LESSON 1

THE BURNT OFFERING: ATONEMENT



If you were to visit Jerusalem today, you wouldn't see priests offering sacrifices on an altar. When the Romans destroyed the temple in AD 70, the worship system described in the Old Testament ceased. No more temple. No more Levitical priests. No more sacrifices.

Christians know that God no longer requires animal sacrifices. Jesus died as our "once for all" sacrifice (Heb. 10:10). The Bible tells us that Jesus bore our sins (Heb. 9:28). He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 9:14). All those who put their trust in Him are made acceptable in God's eyes (Heb. 2:13; 10:10; 13:12).

Objectives

- The theme of Leviticus is holiness.
- Sacrifice is God's method for dealing with sin.
- Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

Text: Leviticus 1:1–9

Warm Up

Ask for several volunteers who are willing to eat a small piece of garlic. After they have eaten the garlic, have them smell their own breath by holding the palm of their hand close to their mouth and nose and then breathing. After they smell their garlic breath, give each volunteer a breath mint. Allow some time for the mint to work, and then ask them to smell their breath again. Discuss how offensive bad breath can be and how the breath mint helped to deal with their bad breath.

Bridge

No one wants to smell someone else's bad breath. It's offensive. We don't want anything to do with bad breath. Because of that, we use breath

Preparation

You will need . . .

- A clove of garlic or garlic powder
- Breath mints
- Handout 1 (1 copy per student)
- Pens or pencils

mints, toothpaste, and mouthwash to deal with the bad breath. In a very small way, this might help us understand how sin offends God.

God is perfectly good. He is holy, and the opposite of holiness is sinfulness. We are sinners. Our sin offends God because it goes against His Law (see 1 John 3:4). It doesn't go away like bad breath, and it cannot be masked. Sin is a permanent stain that separates us from a holy God—a separation that only God can remove.¹

The Bible teaches that God graciously forgives sin. When the Lord met Moses on Mount Sinai, He proclaimed Himself as the Lord God who forgives sin (Exo. 34:7). How can God do this? What must happen for Him to forgive us?

Sin, the opposite of holiness, offends God. How can God have anything to do with sinners when He is holy? Sacrifice was God's way of maintaining a relationship with His people. Instituted over a thousand years before Christ, the elaborate system of Old Testament sacrifice points toward the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross as our substitute—His life for ours—so that God could forgive our sins. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can have a relationship with God.

Lesson

The Book of Leviticus is likely less familiar to you than other books of the Bible. Leviticus is not one of the popular books that pastors preach through. It paints a picture very different from our modern experience. Leviticus is about the rules and regulations for Israel that seem difficult to apply, but God gave us this book for a reason.

Leviticus teaches us about God's holiness—that's the theme of the book. God is holy, and Leviticus demonstrates to us that God has always desired for His people to be holy (see Lev. 19:2). Sin, the opposite of holiness, prevents everyone from having a relationship with God. Something must be done about our sin for us to have a relationship with God.

God established a relationship with the people of Israel. He chose them to be a holy nation (see Exo. 19:5–6). The Book of Leviticus gave Israel specific instructions on how to meet and maintain God's requirements of holiness.

The unfolding of God's Law in the Book of Leviticus begins with sacrifices. Earlier in Scripture, we read other accounts of sacrifices. Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God (Gen. 4:3–4), and so did Noah (Gen. 8:20) and Abraham (Gen. 22:13). But here, God gave the Israelites specific instructions on how to maintain their relationship with Him. Israel's sacrifices may seem strange to us, but as Christians today, we also depend on a sacrifice in order to have a relationship with God. Jesus died on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. We don't need to offer animal sacrifices because Jesus completely took away our sin

(see Heb. 7:27). In this lesson, we will see how God connected the dots between the Old Testament sacrifice and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Law and the Gospel

The Mosaic Law was the way of life for the people of Israel (see Lev. 18:5). God's salvation is always by grace through faith, but the Law required Israel's obedience and guided their worship. What does God's law for ancient Israel have to do with Christians today? People answer this question in different ways, but many people see three divisions of the law:

- Moral laws on ethical behavior (e.g., the Ten Commandments)
- Ceremonial laws on worship (e.g., the sacrificial system)
- Civil laws for governing the nation of Israel as a society (e.g., penalties and restitution)

Most would also agree that the ceremonial and judicial laws are no longer in effect. Jesus, in Matthew 5:17, said He came to fulfill the Law. The Apostle Paul, in the Book of Romans, calls Jesus the "end of the law" (Rom. 10:4) and says that believers are not under the law (Rom. 6:14).

Paul also explains the purpose of the Law. The Law gives us a knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). Through His Law, God revealed what was good and what was bad. No one could claim innocence as a lawbreaker before God (Rom. 3:19).

Paul also calls the Law a "guardian" or "schoolmaster" that served until Jesus came (Gal. 3:24). By this, he means the law was a temporary teacher, instructing Israel how to obey God and worship Him for a fixed amount of time.

It seems clear that we are not responsible to obey the ceremonial and civil laws, but what about the moral laws?

According to the New Testament, believers are now under the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 6:2). What is this law? F. F. Bruce defines it as "the whole tradition of Jesus' ethical teaching, confirmed by his character and conduct and reproduced within his people by the power of the Spirit."² In other words, we should obey everything in the New Testament—some of which overlaps the Mosaic law and all of which reflects God's character.

We know that all Scripture is beneficial for our learning and spiritual growth (2 Tim. 3:16–17). How do we benefit from studying the Old Testament law?

Learning about God's law teaches us about His nature and His plan throughout history. By examining these sacrifices in the Book of Leviticus, we will better understand God's nature and plan for redemption.

How Can We Have a Relationship with God?

Read Leviticus 1:1–2. It's easy to overlook the context of this passage even though it's right under our noses. Leviticus is situated right after Exodus. At the end of Exodus, the people of Israel set up the tabernacle, also called the “tent of meeting,” because this was the place where God met with His people (see Exo. 25:8–9). The people of Israel set up the tabernacle on the first day of the first month of the second year after they left Egypt. It took them another day to finish the job. Once the tabernacle was complete, God came down to meet with His people.
Read Exodus 40:34–38.

God's glory filled the tabernacle. Israel had God's presence through the tabernacle, but how could they have a personal relationship with Him? The problem is that sin separates humans from a holy God. What can be done to fix this broken relationship? The purpose of the burnt offering was to mend this fractured relationship. In this lesson, we will see four different ways the burnt offering made it possible for the people of Israel to have a relationship with God. At the end of the lesson, we will see how Jesus' sacrifice also did this perfectly for us.

Through an Unblemished Offering

Read Leviticus 1:3. God gave instructions on how to offer a sacrifice. Before someone could offer a sacrifice, they obviously had to bring their sacrifice to the tabernacle or temple. In Hebrew, the same word for “offering a sacrifice” simply meant “drawing near.” Leon Morris explains,

When a worshipper made an animal draw near he had the intention of worshipping. He wanted to honour God, to get rid of his sin, to live in fellowship with God and man. He came obediently, bringing the prescribed offering.³

Sacrifice was a visible act of drawing near to God, who dwelt among His people.

Anyone who wanted to offer a sacrifice at the tabernacle could bring a bull from their herd. Cattle were valuable and not something everyone could afford. Later in this chapter, God makes provision for people to offer less expensive animals—sheep, goats, and birds. But notice what had to be true of the offering, according to this verse. The animal had to be without blemish. It had to have all its body parts in good working order. It could not be defective or sick. In other words, it had to be perfect. The sacrifice had to be perfect because God is perfect. He demands perfection, and an imperfect animal would not meet His requirements for a suitable sacrifice.

Cross Reference: The Book of Malachi was written much later in Israel's history. The Jews had returned from exile in Babylon and rebuilt the temple, but they had not turned their hearts back to the Lord.

God expresses His anger with the priests for offering sacrifices with blemishes. **Read Malachi 1:8.** The priests were sacrificing animals that were blind, lame, and sick. God said that these kinds of defective gifts would not please their earthly rulers; therefore, these gifts would certainly not please the Lord. He is a great King (Mal. 1:14). He deserves the best.

God doesn't want junk or leftovers. God's demands for a proper sacrifice teach us that God requires and deserves the best. God wants good offerings. Even though we no longer offer animal sacrifices, we can apply this very same principle of giving God our best.

Discussion: How can you give God your best? You can give Him your time and attention when you make time to study His Word and come to church. You can give Him a portion of the money you earn instead of keeping it all for yourself. You can choose to serve Him with your entire being as a living sacrifice by becoming more like Jesus and obeying Him. Give Him your heart.

We should give God our best. God wanted the Israelite people to give Him their very best animal sacrifices because these animals had an important function.

Through an Atoning Offering

God required burnt offerings for a reason. **Read Leviticus 1:4.** When people brought their animal to offer as a sacrifice, they had to place their hands on the animal's head. This offering was the person's own animal. They had to touch it, knowing that its life would soon be extinguished. There was some level of connection between the two, even if it was just that touch.

Today, we can understand how sad it is to put a sick pet down. Anyone who has ever taken their sick dog or cat to the veterinarian to be put to sleep knows it's a heartbreaking experience. God did not instruct His people to offer their pets, but the offerer would still probably feel some compassion for the animal dying in their place.

The sacrifice was a substitute for the person offering it. Some scholars debate whether the offerers placed their hand on the animal to identify themselves with the animal or to symbolically transfer their own sin to the animal.⁴ Perhaps this act was a sign of ownership.⁵ Scripture does not explain the meaning of this gesture.

We do know that this was God's way of dealing with the sin of the people. Sin offends and displeases God. God cannot have a relationship with sinful people because He is holy and separate from all that is evil.

God has a way to deal with the problem of human sin. A proper sacrifice turns away God's judgment and wrath. This work of God is called *atonement*.

Atonement is God's way of removing a person's sin and restoring a broken relationship.⁶ Because sin offends God, He must judge sin with death. Under the sacrificial system, an animal died in place of the worshiper.⁷ God must judge sin. An innocent animal died, and God would take away the sin and guilt of the person making the offering. God graciously offers forgiveness and life to His people so long as a proper substitute dies in their place.

Through a Dead Offering

Read Leviticus 1:5. You knew this part was coming. The animal must die. The person who brought their bull must put it to death. The Bible does not give specific details on the method of slaughter. Later Jewish sources suggest it was done as humanely as possible "by cutting horizontally across the throat."⁸ The bull was slaughtered. Its blood—symbolic of its life—was splattered on the altar (see Gen. 9:4). The life of the animal was offered in exchange for the life of the worshiper.⁹ The forgiveness of sin requires blood (see Heb. 9:22).

Everyone faces death and judgment because of sin (see Rom. 5:10; 6:23). God instituted the system of sacrifice so that sinners could have a peaceful relationship with Him.¹⁰

Through a Pleasing Offering

Read Leviticus 1:6–9. Next, the person must skin the bull and cut it into pieces for the priests to burn. The priest got to keep the skin (Lev. 7:8). The offerer had to wash certain parts of the animal so their offering would be clean and acceptable to the Lord. Then the priest would burn the entire offering.

The valuable, unblemished offering was burned to a crisp. Although the flame-broiled beef on the altar probably smelled great, the aroma pleased God in the sense that He accepted it. God is completely against all evil. He punishes sin. But the sinner who offered a proper sacrifice pleased God. God responded with peace instead of wrath.

The religions of Israel's pagan neighbors revolved around caring for and feeding false gods, but the true God did not need food or tending. This offering to God was not taken into the tabernacle—God's dwelling place.¹¹ Animals were burned outside on the altar as an offering. God was pleased.

Sacrifices were intended to please God. When sinful people disobeyed God, the Lord punished them with a flood. After the flood, Noah stepped off the ark and built an altar. He offered sacrifices to God, and God was pleased (Gen. 8:18–21). God was no longer angry against sin. Much later, God sent a plague to punish David’s sin. David offered a sacrifice, and God was pleased (see 2 Sam. 24:25). God accepted the sacrifice and brought the punishment against sin to an end. The purpose of a sacrifice is to please God, who is displeased with sin.

Cross Reference: God no longer requires animal sacrifices. But there are other sacrifices we can offer to please Him. **Read Hebrews 13:15–16.** Praising God, doing good, and sharing with others are all sacrifices a Christian can give God. We often use our mouths to praise God in church by singing. Do you ever use your mouth to praise God in speech? Give God praise throughout the day—when you’re alone and when you’re with other people. Your praise is a pleasing sacrifice to God (see Ps. 50:23; 116:17).

Now that we have spent some time studying burnt offerings in Leviticus, we can better understand what sacrifice means for us today. Animal sacrifices are not part of our modern worship. If someone were to kill a bull at church, splatter its blood, and burn its body, people would think that person was crazy. God’s plan for Israel required them to offer sacrifices, but those sacrifices could never secure lasting and permanent forgiveness. In the Book of Hebrews, we read that the sacrifice of Jesus completely cleanses believers from sin (see Heb. 10:12–18).

Animal sacrifice is not for us today, but it does point us to the solution to our greatest problem. How can we as sinners approach God? Through a sacrifice! These sacrifices teach and reveal key doctrines of salvation that point us to the finished work of Jesus Christ.

How Was Jesus the Perfect Offering?

Everyone faces the problem of needing a relationship with God. How can we please Him? We can only please God if we approach Him on the basis of a perfect sacrifice—the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins. Jesus took our punishment upon Himself (1 Pet. 2:24). He appeased God’s wrath against us by dying in our place.

Scripture tells us that the sacrificial system of the Mosaic law did not provide complete forgiveness (see Acts 13:38–39).¹² The animal sacrifices were inadequate (see Heb. 10:4). The death of Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, and the Old Testament foreshadowed and prophesied that this would take place.

Handout: Hand out a copy of “Suffering Servant Substitution” to each teen. Give them time to read the designated verses of Isaiah 53

and fill in their responses. Once they have completed their handouts, discuss how Jesus accomplished everything Isaiah had prophesied.

Answers: 1. *griefs/sicknesses/pain and sorrows/pains/suffering*; 2. *transgressions/offenses*; 3. *iniquities/wrongdoings*; 4. *iniquity/wrongdoing*; 5. *people*; 6. *iniquities/wrongdoings*; 7. *many and transgressors/wrongdoers*.

Let's consider the similarities between the burnt offering sacrifice and Jesus Christ. Of course, the sacrifice of Jesus was superior in every way. His sacrifice dealt with our sin "once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

Jesus Was Unblemished by Sin

For God to accept an animal sacrifice in the Old Testament, the animal could not have any physical defect. It had to be perfect. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was unblemished by sin (see 1 Pet. 1:17–19). He was perfect. Therefore, when He gave His life for us, God accepted Him as the sacrifice.

Cross Reference: The sacrifice of Jesus appeased God's anger against us. **Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.** Jesus was sinless, and He died in our place. We were unacceptable sinners, but now we stand righteous before God.

He was the perfect sacrifice. As a genuine human, He could die in the place of humans. As sinless deity, He could pay for all of humanity's sin.

Jesus Was Our Substitute

God must punish sin. He is righteous. If He overlooks sin, He is not a righteous God. God punishes sin with physical and spiritual death—eternal separation from Him (Rom. 6:23). As with the animal sacrifices offered for the people of Israel, Jesus died in our place.

Jesus was our substitute. He died in our place—His life in exchange for ours (see Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; Heb. 2:9).

Cross Reference: Jesus was the substitute for sinners. **Read Romans 5:6–11.** Jesus did what we sinners could not. We were helpless to save ourselves, and Jesus died to save us.

His death appeased God's anger against us. Because Jesus died in our place, we never have to face God's judgment. As unbelievers, we faced the outpouring of God's righteous anger, and now we have only peace with God, and our sin is washed away (see Rom. 5:1, 11; Col. 1:13–14).

Jesus Died for Us

The innocent animal died for the guilty sinner.

Cross Reference: Jesus suffered and died for us, not on an altar but on a cross. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:3.** There is no gospel without the death of Christ.

Without Christ, we are ungodly sinners, but He died for us (see Rom. 5:8). We can't do anything to save ourselves from God's anger against sin. But Jesus did it for us. He died for us because He loves us (see Eph. 5:25).

Jesus Pleased God

When the animal sacrifice was burned on the altar, God was pleased. If the sacrifice met God's demands, God was satisfied.

Cross Reference: Jesus' perfect sacrifice pleased God. God accepted His sacrifice because it met His demands. The apostle Paul uses the language of sacrifice to describe Christ's death. **Read Ephesians 5:1–2.** This passage says that Christ's sacrifice pleased God. If you have placed your faith in Christ, then you are commanded to follow His example.

We are called to imitate God. We cannot create a universe or work miracles. We can't imitate God in those ways, but we can imitate His holiness by obeying God's commands. We can be holy, as God is holy (Lev. 19:2).

Be holy. Sacrificially love God and others by putting God and other people first. In fact, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is our example to follow. We may not ever find ourselves in a situation that requires us to die for someone, but we can certainly make sacrifices to put God and others first.

Closing

God established a unique relationship with the nation of Israel. Paul explains in the Book of Ephesians that we were once far from God. But now, because of Christ's sacrifice, we have been brought near to God (see Eph. 2:12–13). We have a relationship with our holy God. Later in Ephesians, Paul goes on to say that we cannot live like those who do not know Christ. We put off the old self and put on the new self to be righteous and holy (see Eph. 4:17–24). God is holy, and He expects the same from us.

Discussion: Ask for any final questions or comments. Then close in prayer, asking God to help the group put on the new self and to live righteous and holy lives.



Suffering Servant Substitution

Isaiah 53 is often called the Suffering Servant chapter. Although it was written many years before Jesus died on the cross, it prophetically described how He would one day die as our substitute. Read the verses below, and answer the questions about how each indicates that Jesus would die in our place.

1. Jesus took our _____ and _____ upon Himself on the cross (v. 4).
2. Jesus was pierced or wounded for our _____ (v. 5).
3. Jesus was bruised or crushed for our _____ (v. 5).
4. The Lord laid our _____ on Jesus (v. 6).
5. Jesus was stricken for the transgression or wrongdoing of Isaiah's _____ (v. 8).
6. Jesus bore our _____ (v. 11).
7. Jesus bore the sin of _____ and interceded for the _____ (v. 12).