

Acceptable Offerings

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- [0 : 0 0] How about I pray, ask for God's help. Our Father, we thank you that we can gather tonight. We thank you for your word.
- We thank you for all the good things you give us, even this tricky passage. Father, we need your help all the time when we read the Bible, even when we think we know it.
- Whether the passage is like Leviticus 1. We need your Holy Spirit to open our minds and soften our hearts. And so we ask you would do that now so that we might understand the truth and know how to live in light of it.
- Amen. Excuse me. I've been re-watching a teen drama comedy from my childhood over the last month.
- And apart from being reminded that it could be one of the best TV shows ever, it's really taking me back to those years. High school, that is.
- [1 : 0 4] I wonder if you can remember yours back in the 20th for me. Maybe not so long for some of you. Or a little while for more. I see you.
- Some of you might have fond memories. Some not so fond. My feelings about high school are pretty mixed.
- Funny high school, isn't it? It does have the capacity to be one of the worst places on earth, doesn't it? It's funny what teenagers do to survive there.
- This may or may not resonate with you, but it does with me and it does with this show that I've been watching. And that is what the teen offers in order to be accepted.
- Does that make sense to you? Whether it be the look or perhaps a certain performance, maybe the flex, the wit, the response, the chill, the smarts.
- [2 : 1 4] I see you. The apathy. I see me. But tonight we're starting an epic journey. All about offering and sacrifice.
- We got a big picture last week of Leviticus, didn't we? But it would still help if I set the scene. Last week, we heard that at the end of Exodus, the tabernacle was completed.
- The glory of the Lord came down and settled on the tent. And this is the setting. This is the scene of Leviticus. It might have looked a bit like this. The tribes around the Levites with the priests, Moses, Aaron and the tent of meeting.
- God is very much in their midst, isn't he? And so the question begs, how does a holy God live in their presence?
- Because back in Exodus, when God came down in the mountain in fire and smoke, I wonder if you remember, everybody lost it.
- [3 : 2 0] They couldn't handle it. They were afraid. So how do they live? How do they remain? How do they survive? This is the setting for Leviticus.
- And it doesn't mess around getting into it, does it? If there's any kind of prologue for Leviticus, it may just be verse one and a tiny bit more.
- Have a look. It says, Right from the get-go, we see God's intention and desire with Israel.

For years, God is patient with Israel and their failings, with the prophets and the people. And He's willing, isn't He, to bring them back into relationship with Him.

This is what we'll see throughout Leviticus. And though it's a tiring and arduous process, God instigates.

[4 : 23] He initiates. He calls Moses. He invites him near and gives instructions so that His people will be able to have a relationship with Him.

And this might seem like a small thing, like something that you can read without thinking twice about, but it's a common pattern throughout the history of God relating to His people.

God called. God spoke. God invited. Jesus even does the same thing, doesn't He? Saying, follow me. An invitation to be in relationship.

And it's not instant, is it? But, like we'll see in Leviticus, a gradual process of learning, growing and failing too.

The Lord speaks. He desires His people to be in relationship with Him. Has He invited you, I wonder?

[5 : 31] Does He want a relationship with you? Do you want a relationship with Him? Well, what does He say?

It's very explicit. Point two. Both in this chapter and the next handful of chapters, and that is how to bring an offering and make acceptable atonement.

Have a look from verse two. Speak to the Israelites and say to them, God says, When anyone brings, anyone among you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You are to present it at the entrance of the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord.

You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you. Excuse me.

[6 : 40] Well, it's clear that He's on about offerings. And the rest of the passage unpacks what offerings look like. The Lord speaks specifically about bringing offerings of various kinds.

And what does God have to say about bringing an offering? Well, Mark wasn't kidding, was he? About Leviticus being hard to read and follow, even if it's just chapter one.

That can be tough. Hey, Steph, where are you? To be honest, Mark could have been describing me last week when he talked about starting a new Bible in a year plan and getting stuck on Leviticus.

I think I was 15 at the time. I started with a friend, and I was still in Leviticus when he finished. Thank God that's not why he accepts me.

All I have to do is bring an animal from the herd or the flock. Well, that's what it goes on to say, isn't it? Did you follow the repetition? Three different animals they could bring.

[7 : 53] A young bull from the herd, a sheep or goat from the flock, or a dove or a pigeon. Sorry. It keeps using this word offered, but it means sacrificed, doesn't it?

With body and blood presented to God at the altar. And there's more repetition in the offering, isn't there? The instructions with the blood, did you see, in 5, 11, and 15?

However the carcass ends up, the blood ends up on the altar, splashed or drained. And in each case, the animals are burnt with specific instructions regarding how they're presented at the tent of meeting and the altar.

Killed in a bit of a bloody mess. The bird in particular, it seems. With bodies either skinned, cut up, torn, separated from the blood, and burnt.

Really the kinds of things that if you did, either once or more than once, well, you'd be in some kind of trouble, wouldn't you? And there'd be some suspicion of other violent acts.

[9 : 09] But if we remember the layout of Israel at the time, this wasn't happening in the back alleys, was it? It was front and centre. The instructions were coming from the top.

Well, another repetition you might have seen, the role of the priests. Yes, you bring the offering and do lots of the process. It's your animal you are to offer, but the priest has a special role in each.

Wood on the fire, bringing the pieces to the altar, arranging the pieces on it, and burning. And in each case, splashing or draining the blood on the altar.

And again, you might be feeling like, ah, what a bloody, fleshy, smelly affair.

Yes? Because my nose bleeds sometimes. I'm a bit of an expert at getting blood out of things.

[10 : 12] An important step is soaking and stirring in water not long after the spill. Just a content warning on this next sentence.

If you leave a bloody hanky or three, soaking in water, even if there's washing powder involved, for more than a day, let me tell you, the smell is just reprehensible.

It is not good. I have learned that lesson too many times. Just come back to Leviticus for a moment. Can you imagine this? Hundreds of thousands of people coming daily to have blood splashed around in a tent.

Imagine the smell. Well, there is someone who knows how it smells. Actually, someone who likes the smells. Did you notice? In 9, 13 and 17, a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord?

It's a bit strange, isn't it? Like, is God just into foul smells? Well, the answer is no. And we're going to talk more about pleasing aromas next week, but what is noteworthy about all the blood and the messy process, the complex offering, is just what needs to happen so people can come near to God.

[11 : 46] Remember in the opening verse, we saw God called to Moses to invite him near with Israel with special instructions. It's no small thing to have God's people live in his presence.

And today, we're looking at just one of five offerings in the opening part of this book. Imagine the complexities to come. So here, God's people begin to learn how to draw near and live in his presence by God's invitation through offering blood and atonement.

But there is another important thing to notice, something slightly obscure. We've spent our time looking closely at the offerings that God wants his people to make.

But what I kind of expect of an offering, when an offering or sacrifice is made, is because. But nothing is actually said about why they're doing this.

As we've seen, there's lots about what to do. I think I counted 20 commands in the 17 verses. You are to, you are to, you are to. And the outcome is clear, isn't it?

[13 : 09] Atonement, a pleasing aroma. But it doesn't say why. Now, you could argue that atonement implies wrongdoing. But what isn't there is interesting.

For example, because of your hard hearts. Because you rejected the Lord. Because of your sin. Because of. And we might look for or expect something like this.

I certainly tend to. But it isn't there. Or is it? We're reminded briefly at the start that God descended in the cloud to dwell in their presence.

And what is clear is that something has to change. so they can live with Him. But why? Why change? Well, I think we see it at the end of Exodus then again at the start of Leviticus.

When the tabernacle was complete, the glory of the Lord filled it. And Moses, Moses, who'd been closer to God than any other person, Moses, Moses, who was so close to God that his face glowed such that his brother and the other priests were afraid of him.

[14 : 36] Moses could not enter the tent of meeting when the cloud had settled on it. When the glory of the Lord had filled it.

Moses called to him from the tent of meeting.

When I was a kid and I did wrong, I was sent to my room.

And with no electronic devices in the 80s and 90s, I wasn't too fond of that. Sitting alone, bored, couldn't ever sleep, nothing to do in there, banished, likely not learning as much as my parents had hoped.

And so after what seemed like hours, though probably minutes, I'd open the door a crack and whine. Can I come out now? And my religious parents would say, go get a bull from the herd.

[15 : 47] No, I'm kidding. I'm kidding. A bit like me as a kid, Moses and Israel were out.

God was in. There was separation. Israel had demonstrated that they were not worthy. They could not dwell in God's presence.

They were cut off. Even though he was among them, they could not live with God present. This is how we come to Leviticus 1, with distance, with complexity, with sin.

Yet at the same time, with God's willingness to continue to relate to his people, to invite them near and have them live in his presence, which is good news.

So what about now? What about us? I joked a moment ago about sacrificing a bull so I could come out of my room. It's just so far from today, isn't it?

[17 : 00] Spraying blood around to settle relationships. But living in God's presence, well, still desired, and considering the distance between a holy God and sinful people, God desires people to come to him.

He still invites and calls. But we live in a different time. God was inviting them, but their work to draw near was tiresome and not the solution.

In Jesus, God graciously and powerfully swung the door wide open. no mere human making an offering before God, but God himself and once for all.

Thank God. Thank God. But there's more to think about, isn't there? Like we heard in the New Testament passage, there's this feeling that maybe those who've heard the call, even those who've responded to it, who know that what the Lord's, that what the Lord offers is good.

I know that it's good. This sense of resistance. The king and the banquet remind us of this, don't they?

[18 : 41] Oh, I know. I hear you. I'll come. I'll listen. I'm just going to attend to life.

I'll just attend to my business. Or other, I don't know, excuses that you might think of. Settle those relationships.

Tick off my bucket list. Pay off my house. Become financially secure. Wait till my kids are financially secure. Get that job. Go on that holiday. Finish that degree.

Get married. Be happy. Be happy. So what should we do? Well, not only is the sacrificial system different today, but the dwelling of God is too, isn't it?

[19 : 48] But God's dwelling, it's not here, is it? This is good, but it's not here. It's not a tent.

In fact, in fact, it's no place. Isn't it everywhere or anywhere? Isn't it every time or any time, His people in His Spirit, all of life?

And while we don't offer blood, that's been done, we still ought to offer, yeah? Even our relationships, our bucket lists, our houses, our finances, our jobs, our dreams, our studies, our marriage plans, our happiness.

I wonder if there's a danger in letting the wonder, the great wonder of that invitation, that open invitation, dull a bit.

And our offering in response to what He's done can turn into a thing that we do, rather than a way that we live. I came to church, I read my Bible, I met with Christians, I prayed, I gave, I encouraged, all good things, all good things, but things which could be done while being distracted from the call to live with.

[21 : 35] sounds like a lot, doesn't it? It sounds complex.

Perhaps it fits with Leviticus, what God desires from His people. We do not deserve to live in God's presence, but He has made a way, an open invitation.

By offering His Son, He's invited us to join Him, both then and now. Thank God that we don't have to sacrifice animals.

How would I pray? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Our Father, thanks for inviting even us sinners to live in relationship with you. Thanks for Jesus who offered Himself once for all to completely deal with sin.

[22 : 46] Would you cause many to accept this wonderful invitation to know and come to you and help us who've heard and accepted you to never become distracted that we lose sight of what you've graciously offered.

Amen.