

# Leviticus 1:4-9

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*The LORD gives Moses steps for how the burnt offering was to be prepared if it was a bull or ox. These steps include how it was to be killed, and to create smoke as a “soothing aroma to the Lord.”*

The instruction is now given for the person bringing the offering to do the actual slaying. The *son of Israel* was to *lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering*. By laying his *hand* on the *head* of the *burnt offering*, the person making the sacrifice must sense the life of the animal, its body heat, and empathize with it as an innocent party. The laying on of his hand might symbolize the impartation of the sins of the one making the offering. God directs that the Israelite then *slay the young bull before the LORD*. This was done by slitting its jugular vein and watching its blood or its “life” gush out.

The Israelite bringing the offering not only did the slaying but also could participate in the skinning and washing of the animal. But only the priest could *sprinkle the blood, arrange the pieces and offer it in smoke*.

These details are hard to visualize for modern readers. But to the ancient Israelites performing these sacrifices, it would have had significant meaning regarding how costly and precious *atonement* for sin is, and how an innocent party (the animal) had to die for their *atonement*. This procedure was necessary for the sacrifice to *be accepted for him* (the animal) *to make atonement on his* (the Israelite’s) *behalf*. The word translated *atonement* literally means “to cover” and can also be translated “reconciliation” or “appeasement.” The idea is that the sin of the person is being transmitted into the animal, whose death reconciles the gap between the offender, the vassal making the sacrifice, and the offended, the Suzerain God whose covenant law was broken.

This also emphasizes that God’s covenant was with each Israelite as well as the nation. It was a covenant that required the people of Israel to each act as individual sovereigns. The typical Suzerain-Vassal treaty was between superior and inferior kings. This Suzerain Vassal treaty was between the King of Kings and each Israelite, each of whom was provided this means to atone for sin. When the people later asked for a king, God told Samuel that “they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). By living in a self-governing manner, loving their neighbor as themselves, each Israelite was submitting to their Suzerain King by honoring the covenant they had agreed to, to serve as His vassals.

Burnt offerings (offerings of ascent) could be a free-will offering (non-obligatory), or a sin offering (obligatory). If it was a sin offering it only provided *atonement* for unintentional sins. All of the sin offerings outlined in the law of Moses are not intended for willful, presumptuous, or premeditated sins, as it says in Numbers 15:27-31:

“Also if one person sins unintentionally, then he shall offer a one year old female goat for a sin offering. 28 The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven. 29 You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. 30 But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.”

There were some sins that allowed a guilt offering for intentional sin, which was to be accompanied with an act of restitution by the guilty toward the offended (Leviticus 6:1-7). Other intentional sins required the guilty person to be “cut off,” which would infer either death or exile. The Suzerain God’s covenant was strict in demanding His vassals who had agreed to the covenant to follow the “golden rule,” that they treat one another as they wanted to be treated. This, Jesus said, was the practical way to love and honor God (Matthew 22:36-40). God chose Israel because He loved them, and this was independent of anyone’s behavior (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). But the consequence of deliberate sin was still severe. It required physical death or exile, which is a form of death (separation from community).

In a similar manner, in the New Covenant, God pours His love on those who believe through Jesus’ blood, regardless of their subsequent actions (John 3:14-16). Further, the blood of Jesus covers unintentional sin, and confession of discovered sin triggers Jesus’ blood covering that as well, in each case to restore the believer to fellowship with God (1 John 1:7,9). However, sin that is consciously committed and willfully done still causes severe, negative consequences for believers (Hebrews 10:26-31).

The blood of Jesus was infinitely precious and was shed for the sins of the world (John 3:14-16).

His sacrifice on the cross atoned for our sins, reconciling us to God through faith in Jesus, “...we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:11).

The word translated “reconciliation” in Romans 5:11 is rendered “atonement” in some translations.

After the *young bull* is slain by the Israelite bringing the offering, *Aaron’s sons the priests shall offer up the blood*. Once the Israelite slits the throat of his offering, the instructions then shift to the priests. Next, *Aaron’s sons the priests* would *sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting*. The *priests* would transport and *sprinkle* the blood on the altar and around its base.

*Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar*. The *suet* is the fat located on the kidneys and loins. The passage separates *the head and the suet* from the other *pieces* of the animal in their arrangement on the altar. The fact that the priest is asked to *arrange* the body parts further emphasizes

orderliness and respect for the life of the animal. The sacrifice must be on *the wood*, *the wood* must be on *the fire*, and *fire on the altar*. This wording might be a foreshadowing as to what type of death was determined for God's own Son, on a wooden cross. The cross being a type of altar itself. Abraham, the father of the Israelites, also bound Isaac his beloved son and placed him upon wood which was on an altar. Prior to that, Isaac carried the wood he was to die upon to the hilltop of his sacrifice, just as Jesus carried His cross to the hill of His crucifixion.

The statement, *Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water*, shows the respect that was to be shown to the offering even after the slaughter. When the animal was *cut into its pieces* it would have been easy to mistakenly puncture the stomach or intestines, releasing waste onto the *entrails* and *legs* of the offering. God wanted the priest to *wash* these parts prior to placing them on the altar.

Before arranging the body parts on the wood of the altar, the *sons of Aaron the priest* would *put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire*. They would then make it go up in smoke which is described as *an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord*. The Hebrew word for *soothing* means "to draw satisfaction from." The ascension of aroma and smoke from the "oleh" (ascent) offering was pleasing to God.

God draws satisfaction from the sacrifices of His people. Yet in 1 Samuel 15:22, God says there is something He likes better, which is to be obeyed:

"Samuel said,  
'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices  
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
And to heed than the fat of rams.'"

And Paul writes in Hebrews 13:15-16:

"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

This tells us that although God prescribed these offerings and ceremonies, the true goal was to develop good habits that led to good thinking and obedient actions.

### **Biblical Text**

**4 He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. 5 He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 6 He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. 7 The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. 9 Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.**