



Introduction

One of the most interesting and intriguing topics in the Old Testament is the sacrifices or offerings that God the Almighty had ordered the Israelites to present to Him; and their direct relation to the grand offering of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The Holy Book of Leviticus deals extensively with this issue. In it we come across the terms: offering, sacrifice, and oblation (Korban).

Offering: is a general term that refers to anything offered to God whether in worship or only in fulfillment of His command. For example, anise and cumin were to be offered according to Gods command and not for the sake of worship.

Sacrifice: is the term given to the offering when it involves shedding of blood.

Oblation: is the term given to the offering when no blood shed is involved but the oblation here is meant for worship only. Korban which is derived from the verb kureb is also used and it means bring to God in

worship.

The Holy Book of Leviticus distinguishes five types of sacrificial offerings. Each of which typifies an aspect of the Cross. In addition, each sacrifice along with the accompanying rites (which are typically the same for all types of animals) is a reference to the Cross. These five offerings are:

1. **Burnt Offering:** offered with an animal, a male without blemish. This offering symbolizes the divine aspect of the Cross Offering.
2. **Peace Offering:** offered with an animal also, either male or female. This offering symbolizes the human aspect of the Cross in the sense that the Cross accomplished peace between God and humanity. That is why the offering could be either male or female.
3. **Sin Offering:** offered with an animal, either male or female.
4. **Trespass Offering:** offered with an animal either male or female. This offering is assigned

for those who have sinned unintentionally or out of ignorance; or anyone who felt was in such a situation that required a sacrifice of that kind.

5. Grain offering: offered with grain or wheat.

This article will be concerned with the first type of offering which is the Burnt Offering and its symbolic relevance to the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nature of the Burnt Offering

When God gave Moses the rites that go with the Burnt Offering, He took into consideration the economic situation of the people. Thus, a cow was offered only by those who could afford it. Otherwise, a goat, a sheep or a bird could do. As a matter of fact, the Blessed Virgin Mary was among those who had birds for their offerings because that was all the Mother of God could afford (Luke 2:24).

In all of this, what God was concerned with the most, was the amount of love people were ready to put into their offerings to Him. We see this attitude clearly stated in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ praised the widow who had offered the two mites over those who had offered a lot of money. That is

because in her two mites she invested much more love than the other rich people who had given much more. Therefore, it behooves us to understand God's mind which is obviously set not on the offering as a means in itself, but on the end result which is the amount of love that the offering carries. St. Paul saw this mind of God best manifest in the behavior of the Galatians, "*For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me*" (Gal 4:15). Love will not offer just the minimum requirement, but over and above.

Characteristics of the Burnt Offering:

- *Male (Leviticus 1:2,3):* the Burnt Offering has to be chosen from male animals only because the burnt sacrifice represents the **Divine aspect** of the Cross. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (John 3:16) and "*the Son was obedient to the point of death, death on the cross*" (Philippians 2:8). The ultimate obedience and love of the Son to the point of shedding His blood on the wood of the Cross smelled a sweet aroma which appeased the heart of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the bridegroom of the Church. As the Apostle Paul said, "*For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to*

Christ" (2 Cor 11:2). The word male also indicates seriousness and courage (manliness). "*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be strong*" (1 Cor 16:13). Here St. Paul is urging believers, both men and women to be serious in their spiritual quest. Our Lord was quite serious in His pursuit of our salvation to the point of death, death on the Cross "*for this purpose I came to this hour*" (John 12:27). The Cross was His clear goal, and He went to it in manliness. That is why He rebuked Peter harshly when he tried to stand between Him and the cross (Mathew 16:23). A male sacrifice, therefore, represents our Lord Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the church, and the seriousness of spiritual life.

- *Without blemish (Leviticus 1:2,3)*: the Burnt Offering represents the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy One who is without sin. That is why it has to be without blemish. He testified for Himself by saying, "*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*" (John 8:46). St. Peter says, "*knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb*

without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19). He is a Lamb without blemish and without spot as St. Paul said *"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself"* (Heb 7:26,27). So the lamb without blemish symbolized the Lord Jesus Christ who too was without blemish. When one of the servants of the High Priest struck the Lord Jesus Christ; our Lord replied, *"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"* (John 18:23). This might be misinterpreted by some as being contradictory to the Lord's teaching of turning the other cheek, *"whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also"* (Matthew 5:39). However, under the circumstances in which these words of our Lord were said, we find him defending His deity as being without blemish. Thus our Lord proves that He is innocent, without blemish an acceptable sacrifice (on the Cross). On the other hand, when Pontius Pilate sent him to the soldiers, where he was struck and mocked against, with the words prophesy! Who struck

you? He did not reply back at all (Matthew 26:68; Luke 22:64). The difference between the two situations is that, in the first case (before the high priest); He was being blamed of wrong; but in the second case (before Pontius Pilate); it was only a matter of shame and mockery.

- *To be offered at the door of the tabernacle of meeting of the Lord (Leviticus 1:3):* The explanation for this is that when a person entered the front door of the tabernacle, the first thing he would meet would be the altar of the burnt sacrifice. The person would offer his lamb (or animal) at the door of the tabernacle, so that the priests could examine it. If it is acceptable, they would enter the tabernacle and offer it on the altar. But if not approved of, the offering would not enter the tabernacle. This is why God strictly rebuked the priests of the Old Testament, because they became slack and began accepting imperfect sacrifices to offer to Him. In the first chapter of the Holy Book of Malachi, He says, *"The son honors his father, and the servant honors his master. If I am your father, where is My honor? And if I am your Master, where is my reverence...O you priests who despise my name.* Then the priests, ignorant of what they

have done, respond, *In what way have we despised Your name?* God says, *You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, In what way have we defiled You?*" (Malachi 1:6-8). What God the Almighty wants to convey here is that are we not despising His name by offering the blind or lame on His altar?

Then God tells them in the Holy Book of Malachi 1:13,14, *You also say, "Oh, what a weariness! And you sneer at it, says the Lord of hosts. And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand? Says the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and My name is to be feared among the nations."* These words are harsh words which should make us stop and reflect over the quality of our offerings to God be it our time, strength, energy. Do we offer God our best time? Our strength; do we offer the best of it? When we give someone a gift, we endeavor to give him the best. But when you offer to the Lords brothers (the needy), what do we give? Do we give old things! We tend to give our old things to the church; e.g. an old desk, old clothes, old

furnitureetc. The Holy Book of Malachi 1:14 is a conscience shaking verse in the Holy Bible. It says that when someone has something good, but gives God what is less, he is *cursed*. This goes to show us how much less concerned God is with the type of the offering and more concerned with the quality of the offering. If you have a good offering, but give God what is blemished, He is grieved because he takes it as contempt to His name.

Let us tie this Burnt Offering with the sacrifice of the Cross. St. Paul says in the Holy Book of Hebrews 13:12, He suffered "*outside the gate.*" In the same manner as the burnt Sacrifice was examined before the gate so was He examined before Herod and Pilate. Then He was offered up upon the altar the Cross. As the Holy Gospel of St. Luke 23:13-15 says, "*having examined Him in your presenceI have found no fault in this Man.*" This was a fulfillment of the Old Testament examination of the sacrifice to see if it was without blemish, to be offered on the altar (Luke 16-24). In yelling, Crucify Him, crucify Him none of the Jews knew that they were applying the law. In other words, the people were confirming His right to be offered as an acceptable sacrifice. Just as in the Old

Testament, after the priests found the sacrifice without blemish, they entered it onto the altar; so was He examined, found without blemish and then taken to the Cross.

During the Divine Liturgy, which is the sacrifice of the Cross, just as the lamb was brought before the door of the tabernacle, the oblations (offerings) are presented to the priest to be examined before the door of the altar. So the priest along with the deacons examines the loaf of bread (lamb) and wine. The deacons then declare them good and precious (without blemish). Then and only then and once approved, are they to be brought inside the altar. That is why it is wrong to bring in the oblation inside the sanctuary before examining it. It is also wrong to store the wine inside the sanctuary. The oblations should not enter the altar except after the examination process.

During the examination process, the people say, Lord have mercy forty-one times, representing the scourging of our Lord. This is because just as our Lord was examined with whips, so the church examines the oblations by proclaiming, Lord have mercy.

- *The putting of the hand (Leviticus 1:4):*
 1. It is identification with the sacrifice, attesting to the fact that, just as this lamb is about to die, so does the person offering it deserve this sentence of death.
 2. It is a transferring of the sins from the person to the sacrifice; the sacrifice becomes a replacement or substitution for the person. So when its blood is shed, it is a proof that the redemptive work has been done on my behalf.
 3. It confirms the punishment of sin being death.

The Holy Book of Isaiah 53:6 says, "*And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" and also St. Paul says, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor 5:21).

In the same way, just as the person became one with the sacrifice by placing his hand upon its head; so did the Lord Jesus become one with us

through His incarnation. And in His Body we were all represented. This sacrifice was a redemptive sacrifice for us all, for we all were in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

In the Divine Liturgy this is clearly represented. When the priest chooses the bread, he places his hand on it, praying on behalf of all believers, Remember, O Lord, all the Orthodox Christians, from North to South and from East to West, everyone according to his name and her name. Then he prays for his family, those who wish to be prayed for. So those wanting to put prayer requests on the altar ought to offer them before the examination of the Lamb so that the Lamb (sacrifice) will be offered *for them*.

After the priest remembers everyone, he finally remembers himself in so doing, the church teaches him humility that he should come last.

- *The Sprinkling of the blood (Leviticus 1:5):* He sprinkles the blood all around the altar. This is a symbol that this sacrifice is killed for the whole world. It is sprinkled in a circle, so as to show that there is no limit to its redemptive work. Likewise the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ has no limit it is offered for all sins, all people, at

all ages. In the Divine Liturgy, after the examination process, the priest takes the Lamb and goes around the altar in a circle.

- *The giving of the skin to the priests (Leviticus 1:6)*: This shows us that the first sacrifice offered was that of Adam and Eve because we read in the Holy Book of Genesis 3:21 that God clothed them in skins. How? And from where did God get the skin? It is obvious that they had offered a sacrifice of animals and God used this skin for their covering.

This is why God was disappointed with Cain who offered a bloodless sacrifice; for "*without shedding of blood there is no remission*" (Heb 9:22) so God refused his sacrifice. The skin was given to the priests symbolically, in the New Testament, the skin stands for the work of priesthood in the forgiveness and covering of sins, that is, through the mystery of Confession.

- *Division of the sacrifice into four parts (Leviticus 1:7)*: The sacrifice was divided into 4 parts:
 1. The parts of the body with the *Heart* being the most important organ.

2. Blood representing the soul (sprinkled all around)
 3. Head representing the mind, thoughts
 4. Fat representing energy or strength. When you do physical exertion, you burn fat. God is saying that your sacrifice should be offered "*with all your heart, soul, mind, strength*" (Mark 12:30).
- *Sprinkling of the water (Leviticus 1:9)*: The water symbolizes cleanliness. When a person offers God a sacrifice, he must offer it with a pure heart just as the Lord was pure from without and within. God is not just concerned with the outward purity. This is why all the inner organs were cleansed with water before being placed upon the altar. It also symbolizes Baptism, which cleanses us from our sins. The priest, during the Divine Liturgy, wipes the Lamb with water during the offertory, representing the cleansing of the sacrifice (OT), as well as the baptism of our Lord in the River

Jordan (NT).

Thus is the link between the burnt sacrifice and that the Divine Liturgy. The sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy is the *same sacrifice* of the Cross; as in the Confession at the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest prays It is one sacrifice.

- *Burning the sacrifice completely*: God commanded that the sacrifice be burnt completely. This is so in order to show, first, that the Son accepted in full the fire of the divine wrath against sin, drinking the cup of sufferings to its full. In Gethsemane, He said, "*My soul is grieved even unto death*" (Matthew 26:38). And on the Cross, He experienced sufferings in its fullness. So since this burnt sacrifice showed the divine aspect of the Cross, it must be burned completely. In addition, our Lord fully surrendered Himself by His own will as it is mentioned in the Holy Book of Leviticus 1:3, "*voluntary, of his own will.*"

These were the exact rites in which the burnt sacrifice was to be offered to God; an exact prelude and a replica of the Burnt Offering of the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ Who has offered himself willingly and obediently as a sweet aroma to the Lord out of sheer love for mankind, "*Christ also*

has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph 5:2).

May God smell in us the sweet aroma of obedience and submission to His will, to love Him, and serve Him all the days of our life on earth.

Glory be to His Name.

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