

# *The Trespass Offering: “I Have Sinned, Lord”*

“ ‘ ‘Now this is the law of the guilt offering; it is most holy. In the place where they slay the burnt offering they are to slay the guilt offering, and he shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. Then he shall offer from it all its fat: the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them which is on the loins, and the lobe on the liver he shall remove with the kidneys. And the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the Lord; it is a guilt offering. Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy . . . . ’ ’

“This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering and the ordination offering and the sacrifice of peace offerings, which the Lord commanded Moses at Mount Sinai in the day that He commanded the sons of Israel to present their offerings to the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai” (Leviticus 7:1-6, 37, 38).

We now come to the last of the Lord’s instructions to Moses at Mount Sinai concerning the specifics of the sacrifices that Israel was to make for themselves. We have seen many similarities, yet several distinct differences in these sacrifices. The same is true in the last commanded sacrifice, the tres-

pass offering. While it falls in the same category as the sin offering, some distinct differences can be seen.

## **The Distinctive Characteristics**

To “trespass” means to go beyond a fixed point or boundary. In this case the law of Moses served as those boundaries under which the Israelites were to live. Under the law there were two areas of offense under the ordinances of the trespass offering. The first was a trespass against the “holy things of the Lord.” These offenses would apply to the misuse of the money for the tithe, or eating the flesh of a sacrifice that was not to be eaten, or in some other sense misusing those things that were considered the Lord’s property. The second was a trespass concerning the neighbor-to-neighbor relationships, such as the keeping of another’s property or misusing or destroying something that belonged to one’s neighbor. In both cases, whether the sin was willful

sin or unintentional sin through ignorance, a sacrifice was called for. Some translations use the term “guilt offering” which in some senses is a better term, even though going beyond the boundaries of the law of Moses was a trespass. Three different times in Leviticus where the offering is described, reference is made to the sacrifice as a “guilt offering.”

Notice that if the sin was done in ignorance, it did not excuse the offender because the law had been given: “. . . though he was unaware, still he is guilty, and shall bear his punishment. He is then to bring to the priest a ram . . . . for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a guilt offering; he was certainly guilty before the Lord” (Leviticus 5:17-19). This important point bears emphasis. God determined in what man was guilty and not man himself!

The guilt was not implied guilt but actual guilt. It was to be acknowledged by the sacrifice that was to be made. While there was a difference in the sacrifice for trespassing against the “holy things of the Lord” and against a neighbor, it was God Himself who determined, through the law, how the guilt was to be dealt with.

One of the great challenges in preaching the gospel today is to convince people that they are guilty of sinning against Almighty God. The Bible is God’s Book that defines the boundaries of where man has trespassed against Him. In an era of secular psychology, man has been deluded into not dealing with actual guilt. Many say that guilt can be laid on parents, society, and other offenders, but they never say that the individual is to be responsible for his or her own actions and thoughts. This stands squarely in opposition to the counsel of God. Paul declares,

. . . for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.” . . .

. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9-12, 23).

God says that there is actual guilt in man and we must face that responsibility before the “good news” is actually that.

Closely tied to this challenge of declaring in the preaching of the gospel the guilt of man is the concept of godly sorrow. Another spiritually fatal error today is the concept that nothing negative should be said in the preaching of the gospel. How can men and women ever respond to the gospel if real guilt is never realized? When guilt over sin is realized, the Bible says that it produces a “godly sorrow.” Consider Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Yes, he was preaching the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But in order for the audience to be able to respond to that preaching, Peter had to tell them some negative things, such as their own personal responsibility for cruci-

fying Jesus in the first place. As he was speaking, many there asked in a repentant spirit, “Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter was then able to share the good news of how to get rid of the actual guilt of sin that burdened their lives. Their baptism into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ would cleanse them of their sins, and God at that point could send them the Holy Spirit of promise (Acts 2:38). Part of the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ is the bad news of why He needed to come and why man needs Him so desperately. Sin had come into the world and death through sin (Romans 5:12). Sin produces guilt, and guilt needs to be dealt with through Jesus Christ.

The second difference in the sacrifices is that God not only held the guilt accountable, but He prescribed what was necessary for the removal of that guilt. The very fact that God prescribed the necessary elements for the removal of that sin had some great purposes. One of those purposes found in the requirement of a blood sacrifice may be seen in the call of the worshiper’s conscience to the nature of the trespass. Not only was it a trespass against the “holy things of the Lord,” a violation of His written law, but it also was sin, a violation against Himself as Supreme Being, King, and Creator. The worshiper was never to lose sight of his offenses. By their very nature they were against the nature of God. The sacrifice that was required also brought to mind the nature of a debt the worshiper was to pay—in this case a ram without defect (Leviticus 6:6). For not only among the Hebrews, but also later in history, the Arabs and the Romans used sheep, especially rams, as a common medium of payment of debts, especially in paying tribute.<sup>1</sup> In 2 Kings 3:4, Mesha, king of Moab, had to give the king of Israel “100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams.” This was a payment of tribute. Later, the prophet Isaiah delivered to Moab a mandate from Jehovah which declared: “Send the tribute lamb to

<sup>1</sup>S. H. Kellogg, *Studies in Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1988), 171.

the ruler of the land, . . . to the mountain of the daughter of Zion” (Isaiah 16:1). When the ram was purchased and brought unto the priest, the guilty party was to confess his sins, and the priest was to kill the lamb as in the sin offering. The blood, however, was not applied to the horns of the altar or brought near the holy place, but was sprinkled about the altar as in the burnt offering.

This sacrifice was also required when the trespass was against a neighbor rather than against the Lord. One-fifth valuation was to be added to the restitution of all that was wrongfully taken or used. This was not only to set things right with the neighbor, but also to give the guilty the sense of debt. The sacrifice that also had to be made to Jehovah was a ram, and its valuation was to be determined by the priest. The standard was the tabernacle shekel, and the priest was to determine the neighbor’s loss and the restitution necessary plus the one-fifth valuation added to the restitution. Again we see that the guilty party was in no way to determine his or her own punishment and restitution, but God through His agency of the priests determined what was to be done to satisfy Him and the neighbor who had been wronged.<sup>2</sup>

What a difference could be made in our society today if God’s laws were the standard instead of some of the present secular laws. One area of laws that I want to mention that certainly has to do with violations and wrongs against our neighbors is our modern bankruptcy laws. It must certainly be a sin in God’s eyes for even Christians to declare bankruptcy of the type that they can walk away from thousands of dollars worth of debt and never have a guilty conscience about paying back one cent to the people whom they owe. While secular laws may release one from the debts that they rightfully owe without penalty, we must be reminded that there are no bankruptcy laws in the kingdom of God. God expects us to be honorable people as citizens of the kingdom. This means that we pay our debts as Christians.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 179.

A third difference may be seen between the trespass offering and the sin offering. The sin offering was more in nature for the sins of the nation. The trespass offering was strictly for the individual. Confession and sacrifice were individual and not done by the priest on the Day of Atonement. This gave the worshiper in effect a conscious awareness of sin in his life. Many of the violations in the sin offering were those that were brought to one’s attention after the fact—inadvertent sins and those done in ignorance. While some of that is reflected in the trespass offering, the greater portion of this sacrifice seems to emphasize sins committed willfully. Therefore, the restitution was greater.

### **Christ and the Trespass Offering**

There are some obvious similarities to Christ being the sin offering for all mankind. Yet there are also some subtle differences in Him as the sin offering and at the same time the trespass or guilt offering as well. In Isaiah 53:10 the prophet speaks of the suffering Messiah in these terms: “But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering.” This is not an over-refinement of exposition. The very Hebrew word for “guilt offering” is the same one used throughout Levitical law for the “trespass offering.” The prophet repeatedly in the text speaks openly about “our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5) and that he “bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).<sup>3</sup>

Paul throughout his ministry named many of his transgressions against the Lord, yet he thanked God over and over again for the mercy and grace found in Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12-15). Second, there is the concept found in the sacrifice and also reflected in saved sinners like Paul of debt. This is found in the same Timothy passage (1 Timothy 1:16, 17) and in his letter to the Romans (Romans 1:14-17). Paul was not attempting “works salvation,” but he knew that the great sacrifice that Jesus made on his

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 177.

behalf made him realize the debt of sin that was lifted from his life (cf. Romans 7).

Our salvation from sin needs to reflect that same type of feeling of indebtedness. It is not indebtedness to the Lord in the sense of repayment by our works, but in the sense that as the verse of the song suggests: "He paid a debt He did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay. . . ."

Another significant principle in this type of sacrifice is that the Lord has always required confession, both before and after baptism. The word "confession" means "to agree together." That sense is consistent in both the Old and New Testaments. In the trespass offering of Leviticus, the worshiper was to confess his sins before the sacrifice was made. In effect, he was to agree with what God already knew: His law had been violated, sin had occurred, and guilt was imputed. By an open confession of those sins, the worshiper then had the way of forgiveness cleared before him. In the New Testament before baptism is to take place, repentance and confession are mandated by God so that cleansing can occur. It is an agreement together with God that we are sinners and in need of the blood of Christ. Once that is cleared, then we have access to His blood through our baptism into Him. Confession in the New Testament, as it probably was in the Old, was not a formula statement, but an act of mind and conscience pouring out to God the sins committed against Him. A certain awareness about our sins needs to continue in our minds even after our baptism into Christ. John mentions this in his letter to second and third generation Christians:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

The devil is continually after us with the things he attempts to shove into our minds daily. Confession of our sins keeps us close to God and sensitive to what guilt and transgression

is in His sight. If we ever lose that perspective, we will lose a great part of our spiritual sensitivity and perception.

## Conclusion

This brings to an end the specific sacrifices called for in Leviticus. Although there are numerous repetitions of the various offerings, these five are what constituted the main duties of the priests of God. This short study in no way exhausts the meaning that can be found in examining them in light of the sacrifice of Jesus. However, it is my prayer and hope that these lessons have given you new insights and appreciation for God, His Word, and the gracious gift of His Son on the cross for our sins.

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### *Twenty-five Important Evangelistic Events in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>*

1. The Call of Abraham (Gen. 12)
2. The Institution of Circumcision (Gen. 17)
3. The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19)
4. Esau Selling His Birthright (Gen. 25)
5. The Return to Bethel (Gen. 35)
6. The Ten Plagues on Egypt (Ex. 7—12)
7. Making the Bitter Waters Sweet (Ex. 15)
8. The Smitings of the Rocks (Ex. 17; Num. 20)
9. Receiving the Law at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19, 20)
10. The Golden Calf (Ex. 32)
11. The Day of Atonement Observances (Lev. 16)
12. The Cities of Refuge (Num. 35)
13. The Death of Moses (Deut. 34)
14. Jephthah's Vow (Judg. 11, 12)
15. The Witness of Naomi (Ruth 1)
16. The Conversion and Call of Samuel (1 Sam. 3)
17. Saul's Disobedience and Loss (1 Sam. 15)
18. Saul and the Witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28)
19. David's Kindness to Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9)
20. Elijah's Contest on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18)
21. Haman's Rise and Fall (Esther 3, 6, 7)
22. Daniel's Vision of the Five World Empires (Dan. 2, 7)
23. Nebuchadnezzar Judged and Converted (Dan. 4)
24. Hosea and Gomer (Hos. 1—3)
25. Jonah's Backsliding and Restoration (Jon. 1—4)

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<sup>1</sup>Faris D. Whitesell, *Evangelistic Preaching and the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 110-11. Used by permission.