

## **The Laws of Moses (1450 – 1400 BCE)**

### ***Sacrifices and Offerings***

#### ***Burnt Offerings***

#### ***Cereal Offerings***

**Readings: *Leviticus 1:1-17; 2:1-16; 6:8-23; Numbers 15:1-21; 28:1-8***

### ***Reflections:***

- Now we enter into the ancient world of sacrifices. There are a number of over arching things to note. First, sacrifice is fundamentally about the meeting place between the judgment and mercy of God. These all set up the perfect final sacrifice of Jesus. The most consistent image is that the offering is burned (symbol of judgment and destruction) and makes a pleasing aroma (symbol of satisfying God). Now the idea of sacrifice definitely seems barbaric to us today and when you read this section you can hardly believe that these commands come from the same God who then one day through Christ stands against all this. Yet, at this stage of spiritual development of this small nation, the repetition of the basic images and meaning of sacrifice is apparently critical to Israel getting the concepts God was trying to instill. Therefore these practices are carefully instituted by God. We may miss a key point about Israel's sacrifices because it is not explicitly stated here. There was absolutely no allowance in any case for human sacrifice or child sacrifice, a practice that was common in the ancient world. This no doubt would have been striking to any of the ancients that encountered these Israelites.
- The Tabernacle, the Priesthood, the festivals and the sacrifices are all rich in symbols and pictures. It is like the nation is a child and these are the picture books they have to start to form the spiritual concepts about how life works. The picture of sacrifice reinforced over and over and over...if I sin, a sacrifice must be made, if I am blessed, an offering must be made to thank God.
- Another thing to note throughout this section and future sections is that God at this point is offering grace to all people - Israelites, aliens, men and women, slave and free, poor and rich, those who even make unconscious mistakes. Yet his grace is offered to them in a very detailed, legalistic type system of sacrifice. So everyone can be forgiven but the challenge is maintaining this regiment of sacrifice. When it says in Scripture "mercy triumphs over

judgment” we see how perfectly the death and the resurrection of Christ demonstrates this when compared to the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle.

- These texts describe the different types of offerings: Burnt offerings, cereal offerings, peace offerings, and guilt offerings. The burnt offering seems to suggest that this is like God eating. He wants two lambs and a drink offering every day. It was for ongoing atonement for the people but it definitely seems to suggest that kind of image when it refers to food and drink. Again to modern readers this seems a bit bizarre. The cereal offering is related to the crops and seeking God's blessing on your crops. The peace offering is like having a meal with God, rather than just him eating by himself. It is a symbol of fellowship and restored relationship. Finally sin offerings were for specific sins rather than simply a general type of atonement. The person offering a sin offering must confess their sin. This confession points toward the future practice we see in James the importance of the confession of sin (James 5:16).