

Sacrifices

Instructions for the performance of various types of sacrifices are found in the first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus. There are five main types of grain and animal sacrifice:

Burnt Burnt offering (Hebrew, 'olah; literally, "ascending offering"; Lev 1, Lev 6:8-13) could be a herd or flock animal (bull, sheep, or goat) or a bird (dove or pigeon). The whole animal was burned in the altar fire. It was the most extravagant sacrifice because the entirety was given to God.

Grain Grain offering (Hebrew, minhah; literally, "gift"; Lev 2, Lev 6:14-23) was an offering of fine flour or unleavened baked goods, mixed with oil. A handful of the offering was burned (with incense) in the altar fire. The rest went to the priests.

Peace Sacrifice of well-being/fellowship offering (Hebrew, zevah shelamim; Lev 3, Lev 7:11-35) could be a herd or flock animal. Innards (fat, kidneys, and part of the liver) were burned in the altar fire. Most of the animal was eaten, divided between the priests and the offerer. This sacrifice was associated with feasting and well-being.

Sin Sin/purification offering (Hebrew, hatta't; Lev 4:1-5:13, Lev 6:24-30) dealt with disruption in the relationship between human beings and God. The offering depended on the identity and status of the person required to make it. The chief priest, for example, had to bring a bull, whereas ordinary Israelites brought a female goat or lamb. Those who were too poor to afford a goat or sheep could offer birds, and an offering of grain flour was acceptable from the very poor.

Guilt Guilt offering (Hebrew, 'asham; literally, "responsibility"; Lev 5:14-6:7, Lev 7:1-10) dealt with distinct categories of wrongdoing that disrupted the divine-human relationship, such as unintentional desecration of sacred things. The prescribed sacrifice was a flock animal. As with the sacrifice of well-being and the sin offering, innards were burned in the altar fire; the animal's flesh was eaten by the priests.

These five varied sacrificial offerings have one element in common: the burning of some portion in the altar fire to transform the offering into smoke or a "pleasing odor" that God could enjoy.