

Parshat Vayikra: What is the Sacrifice I desire?

Rabbi Joshua M. Brown - Guest Teacher - Temple Sinai - Atlanta - March 21, 2026

1. Selections from Leviticus 1 & 2

דַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לַיהוָה מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה מִן־הַבָּקָר וּמִן־הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ אֶת־קָרְבַּנְכֶם:

Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them: When any of you presents an offering of cattle to GOD: You shall choose your offering from the herd or from the flock.

(1) [GOD] called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying . . .When any of you presents an offering of cattle to GOD: You shall choose your offering from the herd or from the flock. . . .You shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before GOD. (4) You shall lay a hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in your behalf, in expiation for you. (5) The bull shall be slaughtered before GOD . . . and the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to GOD. . . .

When a person presents an offering of grain to GOD: The offering shall be of choice flour; [the offerer] shall pour oil upon it, lay frankincense on it, and present it to Aaron's sons, the priests... The priest shall remove the token portion from the grain offering and turn it into smoke on the altar as an offering by fire, of pleasing odor to GOD.

2. קָרַב (v) heb

1. to come near, approach, enter into, draw near
2. (Qal) to approach, draw near
3. (Niphal) to be brought near
4. (Piel) to cause to approach, bring near, cause to draw near
5. (Hiphil) to bring near, bring, present

3. Rabbi Dov Linzer

When you give this thing up that you helped to produce - something you feel connected to - and you place it on the altar and it burns and the smoke rises up to Heaven, in some ways, that symbolizes your attempt to reach out and give to and connect with God.

4. Psalm 50

I censure you not for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings, made to Me daily; I claim no bull from your estate, no he-goats from your pens. For Mine is every animal of the forest, the beasts on a thousand mountains. I know every bird of the mountains, the creatures of the field are subject to Me. Were I hungry, I would not tell you, for Mine is the world and all it holds. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of he-goats? Sacrifice a thanks offering to God, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in time of trouble; I will rescue you, and you shall honor Me.

5. Psalm 51

Save me from bloodguilt, O God, God, my deliverer, that I may sing forth Your beneficence. O my Sovereign, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise. You do not want me to

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bring sacrifices; You do not desire burnt offerings; True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart.

6. **Isaiah 1:11-13**

“What need have I of all your sacrifices?” Says GOD. “I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, And suet of fatlings, And blood of bulls; And I have no delight In lambs and he-goats. That you come to appear before Me—Who asked that of you? Trample My courts no more; Bringing oblations is futile, Incense is offensive to Me.

7. **Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, I Believe**

The people were being criticized not for disobeying God’s law but for obeying it. Sacrifices were commanded. Their offering was a sacred act performed in a holy place. . . . They were not criticizing the institution of sacrifices. They were criticizing something as real now as it was in their time. What distressed them to the core of their being was the idea that you could serve God and at the same time act disdainfully, cruelly, unjustly, insensitively, or callously towards other people.

The thought that “if I bring a sacrifice to God, God will overlook my other faults” . . . turns a sacred act into a pagan one, and produces precisely the opposite result . . . It turns religious worship from a way to the right and the good, into a way of easing the conscience of those who practise the wrong and the bad.

The danger of the sacrificial system, according to the prophets, is that it can lead people to think that there are two domains, the Temple and the world, serving God and caring for one’s fellow humans, and they are disconnected. Judaism rejects [this]. Halakhically, they are distinct, but psychologically, ethically and spiritually they are a part of a single indivisible system.

8. **Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed III, 32**

But the custom which was in those days general among all men, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up, consisted in sacrificing animals in those temples which contained certain images, to bow down to those images, and to burn incense before them; religious and ascetic persons were in those days the persons that were devoted to the service in the temples erected to the stars, as has been explained by us. It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of God, as displayed in the whole Creation, that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service; for to obey such a commandment it would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used . . . By this Divine plan it was effected that the traces of idolatry were blotted out, and the truly great principle of our faith, the Existence and Unity of God, was firmly established; this result was thus obtained without deterring or confusing the minds of the people by the abolition of the service to which they were accustomed and which alone was familiar to them.

