

## **"What were the various sacrifices in the Old Testament?"**

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### **Question: "What were the various sacrifices in the Old Testament?"**

**Answer:** There are five main types of sacrifices, or offerings, in the Old Testament. The burnt offering (Leviticus 1; 6:8–13; 8:18–21; 16:24), the grain offering (Leviticus 2; 6:14–23), the peace offering (Leviticus 3; 7:11–34), the sin offering (Leviticus 4; 5:1–13; 6:24–30; 8:14–17; 16:3–22), and the trespass offering (Leviticus 5:14–19; 6:1–7; 7:1–6). Each of these sacrifices involved certain elements, either animal or fruit of the field, and had a specific purpose. Most were split into two or three portions—God’s portion, the portion for the Levites or priests, and, if there was a third, a portion kept by the person offering the sacrifice. The sacrifices can be broadly categorized as either voluntary or mandatory offerings.

### **Voluntary Sacrifices**

There were three voluntary offerings. The first was the burnt offering, a voluntary act of worship to express devotion or commitment to God. It was also used as an atonement for unintentional sin. The elements of the burnt offering were a bull, a bird, or a ram without blemish. The meat and bones and organs of the animal were to be totally burnt, and this was God’s portion. The animal’s hide was given to the Levites, who could later sell it to earn money for themselves.

The second voluntary offering was the grain offering, in which the fruit of the field was offered in the form of a cake or baked bread made of grain, fine flour, and oil and salt. The grain offering was one of the sacrifices accompanied by a drink offering of one-quarter hin (about a quart) of wine, which was poured into the fire on the altar (Numbers 15:4–5). The purpose of the grain offering was to express thanksgiving in recognition of God’s provision and unmerited goodwill toward the person making the sacrifice. The priests were given a portion of this offering, but it had to be eaten within the court of the tabernacle.

The third voluntary offering was the peace offering, which consisted of any unblemished animal from the worshiper’s herd, and/or various grains or breads. This was a sacrifice of thanksgiving and fellowship followed by a shared meal. The high priest was given the breast of the animal; the officiating priest was given the right foreleg. These pieces of the offering were called the “wave offering” and the “heave offering” because they were waved or lifted over the altar during the ceremony. The fat, kidneys, and lobe of the liver were given to God (burnt), and the remainder of the animal was for the participants to eat, symbolizing God’s provision. The vow offering, thanksgiving offering, and freewill offering mentioned in the Old Testament were all peace offerings.

### **Mandatory Sacrifices**

There were two mandatory sacrifices in the Old Testament Law. The first was the sin offering. The purpose of the sin offering was to atone for sin and cleanse from

defilement. There were five possible elements of a sin sacrifice—a young bull, a male goat, a female goat, a dove/pigeon, or 1/10 ephah of fine flour. The type of animal depended on the identity and financial situation of the giver. A female goat was the sin offering for the common person, fine flour was the sacrifice of the very poor, a young bull was offered for the high priest and the congregation as a whole, and so on. These sacrifices each had specific instructions for what to do with the blood of the animal during the ceremony. The fatty portions and lobe of the liver and kidneys were given to God (burnt); the rest of the animal was either totally burned on the altar and the ashes thrown outside the camp (in atoning for the high priest and congregation), or eaten within the tabernacle court.

The other mandatory sacrifice was the trespass offering, and this sacrifice was exclusively a ram. The trespass offering was given as atonement for unintentional sins that required reimbursement to an offended party, and also as a cleansing from defiling sins or physical maladies. Again, the fat portions, kidneys, and liver were offered to God, and the remainder of the ram had to be eaten inside the court of the tabernacle.

The sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ. As with the rest of the Law, the sacrifices were “are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:17). Christians today recognize Christ’s atoning death on the cross as the only needed sacrifice for sin, offered once for all (Hebrews 10:1–10). His death opened the “holy place” for us (Hebrews 10:19–22) so that we can freely enter God’s presence and offer our “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15; cf. 9:11–28; 4:14—5:10).