

Numbers 15:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD, of the herd, or of the flock:

Analysis

And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD, of the herd, or of the flock:

This verse details various categories of sacrificial offerings, each with distinct purposes and significance. The Hebrew isheh (אִשְׁה, "offering by fire") refers to any sacrifice consumed by fire on the altar. The olah (עֹלָה, "burnt offering") was completely consumed, symbolizing total dedication to God. The word for "sacrifice" (zebach, זְבָח) often refers to peace offerings where portions were eaten by worshipers.

The phrase "performing a vow" (le-palle neder, לְפָلָא נְדָר) indicates offerings fulfilling solemn promises made to God. "Freewill offering" (nedavah, נְדָבָה) represents voluntary expressions of gratitude beyond required sacrifices. "Solemn feasts" (mo'adim, מוֹעָדִים) refers to appointed times like Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The phrase "sweet savour" (reach nichoach, רֵיחַ נִיחָח) literally means "aroma of soothing" or "pleasing fragrance," indicating God's acceptance and satisfaction with proper worship.

This comprehensive list demonstrates that worship involves both obligation (required offerings) and voluntary expressions of love (freewill offerings). The mention of "herd" (cattle) and "flock" (sheep/goats) accommodated varying

economic abilities—the wealthy brought cattle, the poor brought smaller animals, ensuring all could participate in worship regardless of financial status. These sacrifices all prefigure Christ's ultimate sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 10:1-14).

Historical Context

This passage was delivered during Israel's wilderness wandering, likely around 1444-1406 BC. The regulations in Numbers 15 were given shortly after the rebellion of Korah (Numbers 16) and the nation's refusal to enter Canaan (Numbers 13-14), which resulted in forty years of wilderness wandering. These sacrificial instructions were prospective, intended for "when ye be come into the land" (Numbers 15:2), providing hope that despite current judgment, God would fulfill His promise to bring them into Canaan.

The sacrificial system established at Mount Sinai (Leviticus 1-7) formed the core of Israel's worship, distinguishing them from surrounding nations. While ancient Near Eastern peoples offered sacrifices, Israel's system was unique in its emphasis on atonement for sin, moral requirements for worshipers, and centralized worship at the tabernacle (later temple). The system required a substantial portion of national resources—animals, grain, oil, wine—demonstrating that worship was costly and central to community life.

Archaeological discoveries have illuminated ancient sacrificial practices. Excavations at sites like Tel Arad and Beersheba have uncovered horned altars matching biblical descriptions. However, these "high places" represented the syncretistic worship God condemned, while the tabernacle/temple system maintained purity. The sacrificial system functioned until 70 AD when Romans destroyed the temple, after which Judaism shifted to rabbinic traditions while Christianity recognized Christ's sacrifice as fulfilling all Old Testament offerings.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How do the different types of offerings (burnt, peace, vow, freewill) reflect various aspects of our relationship with God?
2. What is the significance of offerings being described as a "sweet savour" to God, and how does this apply to Christian worship?
3. How does the sacrificial system's accommodation for different economic levels inform our understanding of grace and accessibility in worship?
4. In what ways did Old Testament sacrifices prefigure Christ's atoning work, and how should this shape our worship today?
5. What is the relationship between obligatory worship (required offerings) and voluntary devotion (freewill offerings) in the Christian life?

Interlinear Text

וְעֹשֵׂה תְּלִין הָעַלְלָה וְעַל הַלְּבָשׂ וְעַל
And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD a burnt offering H176
H6213 H801 H3068 H5930

אִתְּרָה בְּתִדְבֵּר לְפָלָא בְּבִנְחָר אִתְּרָה
or a sacrifice in performing a vow or in a freewill offering H176
H2077 H6381 H5088 H5071

מִן לִיהְיוֹת הַלְּבָשׂ וְתְּלִין כְּיֻמְעָדִיךְ מִן
or in your solemn feasts And will make savour a sweet unto the LORD H4480
H4150 H6213 H7381 H5207 H3068

מִן אִתְּרָה בְּבִקְרָה כְּאֶתְאָן
of the herd or of the flock H176 H4480 H6629

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 29:18 (Sacrifice): And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is a burnt offering unto the LORD: it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

Genesis 8:21 (References Lord): And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

Numbers 28:27 (Sacrifice): But ye shall offer the burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; two young bullocks, one ram, seven lambs of the first year;

Leviticus 27:2 (References Lord): Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation.

Philippians 4:18 (Sacrifice): But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

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