

Lesson 11

August 16, 2026

Oxen and Offerings: Christians should express devotion to God through sacrificial giving.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson examines various sacrifices, particularly those involving oxen. It explores David's offering at Araunah's threshing floor to end Israel's plague. David would not offer God something that cost him nothing, revealing that authentic sacrifice is an investment in worship. Solomon's temple dedication, with the sacrifice of sheep and oxen, is an example of worship through extravagant giving. Elisha's response to Elijah's call is marked by a gesture of commitment as he sacrifices his oxen and burns the plow. Paul's illustration of the ox eating from the grain it grinds reveals the right of ministerial support. These accounts emphasize devotion and cost as necessary for sacrifice.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The old covenant Jewish sacrificial system utilized various animals, each carrying specific symbolic and ritual significance. Bulls, goats, and lambs were central, used for sin, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, with the lamb notably symbolizing redemption in the Passover sacrifice. Birds like turtledoves and pigeons accommodated those who could not afford expensive offerings, which demonstrated the system's inclusion of people from all social strata. Rams and heifers were used in ceremonies such as purification and covenant dedications. These sacrifices emphasized obedience, repentance, and holiness in the relationship between God and His people.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. ROYAL OFFERINGS: 2 Samuel 24:18-25; 2 Chronicles 5:1-6.**
 - A. Offerings to End Judgment, (2 Samuel 24:18-25)
 - B. Offerings to Dedicate the Temple, (2 Chronicles 5:1-6)
- 2. FORSAKING FARMING TO FOLLOW GOD: 1 Kings 19:14-21; Proverbs 14:4.**
 - A. The Future Prophet's Sacrifice, (1 Kings 19:14-21)
 - B. The Proverbial Profitable Oxen, (Proverbs 14:4)
- 3. SUPPORTING MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL: 1 Corinthians 9:4-14.**
 - A. The Ox Eats As It Plows, (4-10)
 - B. The Right to Reap, (11-14)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. ROYAL OFFERINGS: 2 Samuel 24:18-25; 2 Chronicles 5:1-6.

A. Offerings to End Judgment, 2 Samuel 24:18-25.

In these verses, we witness a profound moment in which King David takes decisive action to end a divine judgment upon Israel. After David's census of the people, which displeased God, a pestilence (plague) swept through the land. At the instruction of the prophet Gad, David went to the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite to build an altar and offer sacrifices to the Lord. This underscores the significance of offering as an act of repentance and reconciliation. David's willingness to follow God's directions and his insistence on purchasing the threshing floor and oxen at full price highlight the principle that sacrifices to God should be something of value. David's act reflected his devotion and humility.

The story concludes with David's heartfelt sacrifices, resulting in God's mercy as the plague ended. This shows the power of sincere worship and obedience in restoring a broken relationship with God. David's actions remind us that genuine offerings are not about convenience or token gestures but about giving our best to God, even when it requires sacrifice. This account also reveals God's grace, showing that while His judgment is just, His mercy is greater for those who turn back to Him with contrite hearts. This passage encourages us to approach God with humility, offering not only material gifts but also our lives as acts of worship and commitment to His will.

B. Offerings to Dedicate the Temple, 2 Chronicles 5:1-6.

The completed construction and dedication of Solomon's temple in this passage mark a pivotal moment in Israel's history. The text highlights the immense number of sacrifices offered before the ark of the covenant was brought into the temple. These sacrifices were not merely ceremonial; they symbolized the people's deep desire to honor God and seek His presence among them. The abundance of offerings, described as so many "sheep and oxen that [they] could not be counted or numbered for multitude" (v. 6 NKJV), emphasizes the magnitude of their devotion and the desire of the congregation to express their worship.

The sacrifices in this passage also exemplify lavish worship. Each offering represented a significant act of surrender, as the people gave from their flocks and herds – valuable resources in a society dependent on animals for farming and livelihoods. This act of giving demonstrated their willingness to prioritize God above material possessions. Also, these sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the need for atonement once and for all. This passage invites reflection on what it means to offer our best to God. While we may no longer bring sacrificial animals, we are called to present ourselves as living sacrifices in response to His saving grace and goodness.

Second Samuel 24:18-24 and 2 Chronicles 5:1-6 show that sacrifices in the Bible held profound significance. One illustrates repentance to halt God's judgment, while the other expresses gratitude to invite His presence. The former occurs on a humble threshing floor, the latter during a grand temple celebration. Yet both emphasize commitment and devotion, urging

is to leave our comfort zones, deepen our faith, and affirm our relationship with God. Through such acts, we welcome His presence into our lives with lasting impact.

2. FORSAKING FARMING TO FOLLOW GOD: 1 Kings 19:14-21; Proverbs 14:4.

A. The Future Prophet's Sacrifice, 1 Kings 19:14-21.

The story of Elisha's transition from farming to becoming a prophet is a powerful testament to the unexpected ways God calls individuals to serve Him. At this point in the narrative, the prophet Elijah was grappling with despair and isolation, believing himself to be the last faithful servant of God. However, God reassured him that His work was far from finished and instructed him to anoint Elisha as his prophetic successor. Elisha was plowing his family's fields with twelve yokes of oxen when Elijah approached him and placed his cloak upon him. This symbolic act signifies the passing of prophetic authority and marks the beginning of Elisha's extraordinary journey.

Elisha's response to this calling was both immediate and wholehearted. After Elijah placed the cloak on him, Elisha didn't hesitate; he ran after Elijah, indicating his willingness to follow. However, before leaving, he asked to say goodbye to his parents, a gesture that reflects both respect for his family and the weight of his decision. Elijah's reply – "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" (v. 20) – suggests that the choice rested with Elisha. In a remarkable display of commitment, Elisha slaughtered his oxen, burned the plowing equipment and cooked the meat, which he shared with the people around him. This act was deeply symbolic; by destroying tools, Elisha demonstrated he was leaving his old life behind and embracing his new role as a prophet. It's a vivid reminder that answering God's call often requires sacrifice and a willingness to let go of what is familiar and comfortable.

The story concludes with Elisha following Elijah and becoming his attendant, marking the beginning of a profound mentorship that prepared him for his future role as a prophet. Elisha's immediate and decisive actions show us what it means to respond to God with faith and determination. His story also invites us to reflect on our own lives: Are we prepared to sacrifice anything that holds us back in order to embrace a higher purpose? Elisha's journey reminds us that God often sees potential in us that we may not see in ourselves, and when we step out in faith, He equips us for the work He has planned.

B. The Proverbial Profitable Oxen, Proverbs 14:4.

Proverbs 14:4 states, "Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox." This simple yet profound verse highlights the essential role of oxen in ancient agricultural societies. It encapsulates a timeless truth about productivity and the necessary messiness often accompanying meaningful work. In ancient times, oxen were needed for farming and food production. They were the engines of the agricultural economy, pulling plows to till the soil and hauling heavy loads during harvest. Without oxen, the fields would remain unplowed, and the harvest would be meager. While the absence of oxen might mean a cleaner crib (manger) – free from the daily toil of feeding and cleaning up after these animals –

it would also mean a lack of sustenance and prosperity. The verse reminds us that meaningful achievements often require hard work, dedication, and a willingness to embrace inconvenience.

In a broader sense, this proverb also speaks to the necessity of investment and effort in any fruitful endeavor. For ancient societies, owning and caring for oxen demanded resources, time, and labor. Yet, the returns were undeniable because oxen multiplied a farmer's capacity to produce food and sustain their community. Similarly, in contemporary life, pursuing growth and success often entails embracing challenges and enduring some degree of discomfort. Whether it's managing a busy workplace, raising a family, or pursuing personal goals, we must recognize that productivity and progress often come with their own version of a messy manger. Proverbs 14:4 encourages us to see beyond the temporary inconvenience and focus on the greater reward that comes from diligent effort. It's a reminder that while the path to success may not always be tidy, it is worthwhile.

Elisha's story beautifully illustrates how God meets us in the ordinary and calls us to extraordinary purposes. Elisha's act of burning his plowing equipment symbolizes trust and surrender, challenging us to consider what we must leave behind to embrace God's call. This story reminds us that answering God requires faith, sacrifice, and stepping into the unknown. Yet, like Elisha, we too can trust that God equips us for His purposes and recognizes our potential – even when we may not. Are we ready to respond “yes” with the same faith and commitment as Elisha?

3. SUPPORTING MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL: 1 Corinthians 9:4-14.

A. The Ox Eats As It Plows, 1 Corinthians 9:4-10.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul expressed an important principle: Those who minister to others in spiritual matters have a right to material support. Paul begins by asking the Corinthian church whether he and Barnabas had the right to provisions in places where they ministered. By way of comparison, he asked whether a soldier serves his own expense. He emphasizes the fairness of compensating those who dedicate their lives to advancing the Gospel. Just as a farmer expects to partake of his crops and a shepherd benefits from the milk of his flock, ministers of the Gospel should receive provisions for their labor. Paul's argument is rooted in both logic and Scripture, as he draws upon Deuteronomy 25:4, which states, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” Though seemingly about animals, this Old Testament law carries a broader principle: Those who work deserve to benefit from their efforts.

Paul's use of this metaphor emphasizes the dignity and value of ministerial work. He reminds the Corinthians that spiritual labor is no less demanding than physical toil and that it is only right that those who sow spiritual seeds should reap material blessings. By referencing Scripture, Paul elevates this concept beyond mere human reasoning; it is a principle established by God. Notably, Paul's tone is not one of entitlement but rather one of fairness and mutual respect. Ministers dedicate themselves to nurturing the spiritual well-being of others, often at significant personal cost. Supporting them ensures they can continue their work without undue

hardship. For modern readers, this passage serves as a gentle reminder to honor and care for those who pour into our spiritual lives, recognizing that their efforts are essential to the growth and health of the church community.

B. The Right to Reap, 1 Corinthians 9:11-14.

Paul continues his compelling argument in verses 11-14 for the rightful support of ministers who dedicate their lives to the work of the Gospel. Paul begins by drawing a parallel between spiritual and material investments, stating, “If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?” (v. 11 NKJV). Here, Paul highlights the natural exchange between those who labor in spiritual matters and those who benefit from their ministry. Just as a farmer reaps a harvest from the seeds they sow, ministers who tirelessly nurture the spiritual growth of their communities deserve to share in the material blessings of those they serve. This is not a transactional relationship, but rather a recognition of the mutual responsibility within the body of Christ. Paul’s tone is not one of entitlement but of reason, reminding believers that supporting their leaders is both logical and Biblical.

Paul reinforced his point by appealing to broader principles rooted in Scripture and everyday life. He referenced the practice of priests in the temple who partook of the offerings brought to God (v. 13) and concluded with the directive: “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (v. 14 NKJV). This command shows that providing for ministers is not merely a suggestion, but a divine principle. By supporting their leaders, believers enable them to focus fully on their calling without undue concern for material needs. Paul’s teaching encourages a culture of generosity and mutual care within the church, where ministers can thrive in their mission and congregations can flourish under their guidance. In essence, 1 Corinthians 9:11-14 serves as a timeless reminder that investing in those who labor for the Gospel is an act of worship and gratitude, reflecting the heart of God’s kingdom.

In 1 Corinthians 9:4-14, Paul emphasizes the need to support those devoted to God’s work, likening it to how soldiers, farmers, and shepherds deserve sustenance from their labor. This passage underscores the spiritual importance of generosity and gratitude, urging us to care for those who nurture our faith, such as pastors and missionaries. Support goes beyond finances to include prayer, encouragement, and appreciation, fostering unity in the body of Christ. By living out this principle, we honor God’s design for community and show love in action.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As followers of Christ, we must be an example to others with regard to our sacrifices in service to Him. As Paul stated, we should be cheerful in all that we give (2 Corinthians 9:7).

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Giving in tithes and offerings is a sacrifice from our treasures but sacrifices of our time and talents should also be given to God to further the ministry of the Gospel through our church.

Animals Offered to God as Sacrifices

Prominent in the Old Testament are instances of animals being offered to God as sacrifices. The practice of sacrificing animals to God dates back to the first human family (Genesis 4:1-5), and this practice was resumed by Noah after the Flood (Genesis 8:20-21). Animals were sacrificed to God for two basic purposes: to obtain forgiveness of sins or to express gratitude to God for blessings.

Under the leadership of Moses, the priesthood for Israel was established, the sacrificial system was institutionalized and presided over by the priests, and all sacrifices had to be made on a large altar in the Tabernacle courtyard, and later on a larger altar in the Temple at Jerusalem. After the Temple was built, sacrifices to God could be offered only in the Temple. (The whole Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament is all about the ministry of the priests of Israel and the sacrifices.)

Animals sacrificed to God had to be the property of the one offering the animal for sacrifice. The animal had to be in good health with no physical defects or any kind. Only domesticated animals could be offered in sacrifice to God, and only oxen, bulls, heifers, sheep, goats, pigeons, and doves could be offered. If a person could not afford to offer one of the more expensive animals, a less expensive animal was acceptable, but the giver was expected to offer the best they could afford.

The purpose of offering an animal in sacrifice to God for the forgiveness of sins was repentance, accompanied by the acknowledgment of one's sin and that the just penalty for sin is death, symbolized by the death of the animal. God's forgiveness was granted to the sinner because they, by faith in God, acted in obedience to God by repenting and offering the sacrifice.

As Christians talking, preaching, and teaching about the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, it is important to remember that, for the Jews, the sacrificial system ended with the destruction of their Temple by the Romans in AD 70. Without those sacrifices, Jews believe the forgiveness of sins is obtained from God as a gift of His mercy and grace to the sinner who repents.

WORKSHEET

Smart Money

According to Proverbs 3:9, what should we seek to do with our possessions?

What financial warnings are given in the scriptures below?

- **Hebrews 13:5:**
- **Romans 13:8:**

Describe the three types of giving seen in these passages:

- **Malachi 3:10:**
- **2 Corinthians 9:7:**
- **Proverbs 19:7**