

## Chapter 8: Right Sacrifices

(Zechariah 7; Ezra 5:2-17 & 6)

Ezra 4:24 states “*Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*” When the enemy strikes God’s people, they will feel the impact of the battle. After a physical attack to our body, we have a hard time reconciling what we should do next to recover and renew ourselves to be healthy once again. This is the same response we have to our spiritual being. The blows from the enemy are hard. And even though as believers we have God on our side (Romans 8:28) and Jesus strengthening us (Philippians 4:13), the impact of Satanic attacks are real and they cause a time where we have to stop! Don’t take this wrong, we aren’t stopping because we should spiritually. We stop because we are human. However, even in the midst of our frailties, God meets us where we are. For the Israelites who were being led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua in rebuilding the temple, God sent Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1). He sent them to preach truth into the lives of the people. One of these truths came from Zechariah 7 in the form of them looking at the sacrifices they are making to the Lord.

God used a question from the people as a way to bring forth the truth. To help us understand their question and God’s truth, we must realize why the question was being asked. The exiled Jews had been remembering the time of Nebuchadnezzar burning the first temple in 586 BC by mourning and fasting in the fifth month. Now that the temple was being rebuilt, they were inquiring of the Lord if they should continue with this ritual. It is important that we realize this was a man established ritual. They had decided on their own (not directed by God) to remember this time and had been doing so for nearly 70 years. On their own, they decided this was a sacrifice they could make to the Lord. The answer God gave to them through the prophet Zechariah points once again to how God desires righteousness over our sacrifices. He desires that we execute justice, show mercy and compassion and take care of the orphans, widows and poor (Zechariah 7:9-10). In a resounding of Micah 6:8 which was told to them before the exile to Babylon, God expresses to them once again that He does not want their sacrifices. He wants their hearts. He wants their hearts to pump the blood of righteousness through it. He wants them to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly before Him.

When we stop after a battle with Satan, it is a time for us to remember what God really desires. He really desires our heart - not our sacrifices. When He has our heart, we will be obedient to His Word. Disobedience to what the Lord calls for us to do is what brings about the wrath of the Lord, the consequences of disobedience. (See. Zechariah 7:11-12) But when we obey, there is a peace that is brought into our lives. A peace that is preceded by trusting the Lord.

### Obedience leads to Trust: Disobedience leads to Sin

*“Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord.”* Psalm 4:5

The Lord reveals in Psalm 4:5, *“Offer the right sacrifices and trust in the Lord.”* This Scripture makes one wonder - what are the right sacrifices? Now that is a lifelong spiritual growing question. Psalm 4 is a Davidic Psalm. Under Mosaic law, David would have been referring to the sacrifices God established for each type sin. However, we know Christ was the one and last blood sacrifice. Thus, on this side of the cross the right sacrifices are those that are righteous through Christ. How do we know which of our sacrifices are righteous and which are self designed? By looking into the Word of God and being obedient to it. These steps of obedience will always lead us to the right sacrifices. Within ourselves, we can’t have the right sacrifices. And in the midst of this spiritual warfare, the enemy will continue to try and steer us toward sacrifices that are self-serving. There is no way we can design a sacrifice that is acceptable to the Lord unless we are being obedient to His Word.

Recall the offerings of Cain and Abel. At first it may seem God is being unfair to Cain by rejecting His offering, but a closer look shows us that Cain was being disobedient to God. He wasn't bringing the offering God taught His family to give. Instead he was bringing his own self-designed offering. When Cain became angry, God warned him that sin was crouching at his door and that it desired to have him but he must master it. (Genesis 4:7) However, right in the middle of this warning from God He asked Cain, "*If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?*" God wants us to offer right sacrifices. He doesn't want to reject our sacrifices. When we are obedient and follow His Word, the right sacrifices will be offered and there is an "acceptance process" that begins in our lives. This process begins with right living and ends with trusting the Lord.

What is this "acceptance process" that begins in our lives when we offer the right sacrifices? First, let's establish what God truly meant when He told Cain, "*Will you not be accepted?*" Looking at the Hebrew word that is translated as accepted (*seeth*), we see the meaning of the word is swelling. It originated from the word *nasa* which is a verb that means lifted. In the usage here, God is saying to Cain, will you not be lifted? Other definitions are exalted, dignified, raised. God is wanting Cain, and us, to see it isn't an accepting in the term of being adequate or suitable. We can never offer a sacrifice that would meet these standards. What God is saying is if we offer the right sacrifices - if we are obedient to what He has asked us to do - then He will lift us up and exalt us because our heart is in the right place.

Through the blood of Christ, God has given us what we need to have this heart change. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross satisfied the requirement of the law for redeeming us from our sins, and our accepting His sacrifice means we are acceptable before God. So what does this "acceptance process" take us towards on this side of the cross? Just because one is a believer doesn't mean that every sacrifice they make in their life is a right and acceptable sacrifice to God. God desires for us to trust Him, but so many times the sacrifices we make in our lives are not ones that are trusting in the Lord. Instead they are sacrifices we have deemed right for the service we desire to give to the Lord. If we are to be obedient to the Lord, we are to do so as He desires obedience, not as we pronounce as obedience.

The best example I can give of this is of my daughter when she was younger. Our daughter does desire to do what her father and I tell her. However, she doesn't desire to do it our way, she wants to do it her way. For example, we tell her to fold the laundry and put it away. A simple task that would take me or my husband approximately 5 minutes to do. She would take that simple task and create a whole new system in doing it. The last system she created was a checklist of all articles of clothes and how many there were and what area of the house they belong. Now I understand the desire to make a list. I, too, am a list maker and I am probably the one she got it from. However, the task was to fold and put away laundry -- a plain and simple 5 minute job that she turned into a 1 hour job.

So the question that is in all of our minds is - what is wrong with that? It took her longer, but she still got the job done. Ahhh, that is a state of mind the enemy would love for us to stay in. In this example, the problem was that as her parents we had many other things that needed to be done and as a member of the family she was to help in those other things as well. However, she was distracted by her own technique. This technique, while it got the job done, was not a healthy way for her to learn how to put away laundry. As she grows up, she will have many more demands on her than what we as her parents currently give her. She needs to learn a healthy way to live life. That is what God has assigned for her father and I to teach her. For her to learn from us, she must trust that our way is the best way.

Now that seems like a very whimsical example, but consider this - As believers, God has much for us to do and much love for us to display into this world. However, we are distracted by our own techniques - our own sacrifices. And in the process, we are beginning to trust in ourselves instead of God. There is one truth my spiritual walk has revealed to me time and time again. I can't trust God if I'm not being obedient to His word. Oh yes, I would pray and beg God to give me the strength to trust Him, but because of my disobedience I would feel fear that leads me to holding things in my hands instead of allowing God to take them. But when I would obey. Oh my, I can go on and on about the overwhelming blessings of being exalted by the Lord.

It is important that we realize the blessings being referred to here are not material ones. All material blessings are to be used to bless not only yourself, but others as well. The blessings being referred to here are spiritual blessings. These are blessings for opportunities to witness through living our lives in a way that produces fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). It is these blessings that lead people to Christ and the fulfillment of the great commission in our lives. On this real battlefield we face, Satan desires to steal as many blessings as he can. He does not desire for you to have the blessings of God because the more blessings you have from God the more you will be led to trust Him.

### **Obedience Leads to Trust: Trust Leads to Peace**

Psalm 4 concludes with these last three verses:

*<sup>6</sup>Many are asking, 'Who can show us any good?' Let the light of Your face shine upon us, O Lord.*

*<sup>7</sup>You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.*

*<sup>8</sup>I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."*

Psalm 4:6-8

We can grasp within these verses a mental picture of what trust looks like. These verses really wrap up the overall concept of being obedient to God's Word and resting in Him. There are many times in our spiritual walk when we have been obedient to His Word and then we must take a leap of faith by a response of trusting Him. When we do, we will "lie down and sleep in peace." At these moments in my spiritual walk I address them by asking myself, "What else is there left to do to prepare for this leap of faith?" If the answer to that question is for me to trust in the Lord, then I know that is what I must do. Consequently, following Christ means action AND rest. In other words, there is a part that we play in yielding and being obedient. However, throughout these steps of obedience our actions must continually slow to the realization of rest to acknowledge Whom we trust in -- Christ Jesus!

Let's not miss a particular part of the temple rebuild in Ezra. After they started back to work on the temple, there is a particular attitude of peace. We see it in Ezra 5:3-5. They are questioned, "*Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?*" Now remember, this type of questioning and opposition pressed upon them in the past caused them to stop building (Ezra 4:23). But they continued in obedience. I love how the Scriptures record this,

*<sup>4</sup>They also asked, "What are the names of those who are constructing this building?"*

*<sup>5</sup>But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews,*

*and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received."* Ezra 5:4-5

God's hand was exalting the Jews so much that the people didn't dare try to stop them. Basically, they knew they needed to have backing from King Darius if they were going to stop them, so they thought they would try to get that first. However, don't miss the subtle understanding of obedience. The people of God kept being obedient to God. They kept working. Wow! And it seems they were making good time also because they began work again in the 2nd year of the reign of Darius (Ezra 4:24) and dedicated the temple in the 6th year of the reign of Darius. We see in 1 Kings 6:38 that it took Solomon seven years to build the first temple. Even though it was a smaller temple, this is still amazing to me. These men, who were under great opposition and limited resources, took at the most four years to build what took Solomon, who was under no opposition and fully funded by King David's work, seven years to do. That is what God means by He will exalt us. Our small steps of obedience will exalt us to trust Him and ultimately bring a peace and rest to do what we have been called to do.

It is Christ in Whom we trust and it is Christ that directs us in doing good. It is the Word that shines His face on us and shows us the direction we should go. He is the One Who fills our hearts with greater joy. And note the use of "-er" at

the end of great making this a comparison. This joy that Christ fills our hearts with is greatER, or just think MORE than, any other joy we can encounter in our lives. It is in the midst of the greater joy - joy given by Christ's own Spirit - that we experience true peace. A peace that allows us to rest regardless the circumstances or turmoils in our lives. This cannot be obtained if we don't trust the Father.

### **Generational Curses**

Now that we realize our right sacrifices come from obedience, let's visit an important issue that will keep us from hearing the Lord's call for obedience in our lives - generational curses. I've chosen to include it in this section because acknowledging generational curses leads us to further discoveries about right sacrifices.

To better understand generational curses, it is best for us to acknowledge how Satan works in setting up a stronghold in our lives. Satan sets up strongholds in areas of our lives when we do not strive to submit to the Holy Spirit in regards to that part of our life. We set ourselves up for such an attack from the enemy when we don't focus on fully submitting every part of our lives to God. The enemy's strongholds often capitalize on our weaknesses. Compulsions, worldly obsessions, fears, lusts, jealousies, uncontrollable tempers, etc., are often signs of a stronghold that is either being built or firmly established in our lives. In most cases, we will recognize that something is out of control, but we may catch ourselves making excuses as to why we cannot gain control over it.

A generational curse is a regenerating stronghold in our family. This usually happens because generations ago a member of our family didn't submit to the Holy Spirit and, thus, allowed Satan to set up a stronghold in their lives that they reasoned away and passed on from generation to generation. When a generational curse is present, we will not see true righteousness because we will feel the stronghold is just a part of our lives - a part of who we are. Thus, we create our own terms of sacrifices to the Lord - not what He would consider as an act of true change in heart. Creating our own terms for sacrifices to the Lord does not allow the truth of His Word to penetrate our heart and renew us in Christ. We will no longer look to God for His ways but to ourselves and what we know as our ways. When we realize such generational curses, we must work on breaking free.

Let's look at what a generational curse is not. It is NOT a source to blame for every sin and problem in your life. A generational curse is not something that gives us an excuse to sin. However, discovery of it does help us address the sins in our lives. When you discover a generational curse in your family, it can be used as a guide to seeing why you may be ignoring certain sins in your life. In general, when a father has a sinful lifestyle, his children are likely to practice the same sinful lifestyle. Therefore, when God says in His Word that the iniquity of the father will be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:5), it is referring to this fact of children repeating the sins of their father. This goes back to our human nature. God is stating a fact here about how powerful sin can be in the lives of man. He is not stating that this generational curse cannot be broken. In fact, God provides the way for it to be broken. By accepting Jesus as our Savior, we are forgiven for our sins; however, salvation alone will not break the generational curse. It is when we strive to live in God's ways that we can break this curse of sin in our lives and, thus, we begin living a godly life that leads to our children learning a godly life as well.

I have direct personal testimony in regards to a generational curse. I come from a long line of generational sinners who are "spewers" in regards to their anger. We term it as "having a temper" but in reality it is "allowing a temper." If something angered me, I just blew up. Everything in my path would hear about how I felt and what I thought. And if things didn't begin going my way, I would become critical. Many times the critical spirit led me to talk in a degrading manner to someone - not building them up at all. Even as I write these words, I am embarrassed about the remembrance of such things.

Over the years, the Lord has shown to me what it means to have a generational curse on your family. I am learning that there is a generational curse on my family in regards to this response to anger. I fight everyday to stand in the gap and break this generational curse. However, it is so deep down inside me that it becomes a moment by moment by moment struggle. I know God has set me apart for this purpose. I know He will break this curse if I do as He instructs in Psalm 4:3-4. When I am angered - do not sin - get private - search my heart - be silent. Think of what my family sees in this regards - a Godly way to deal with anger. These acts along go far in breaking that curse.

Again, we must consider the battlefield that we are on. Generational curses are a technique of the enemy that begins with a stronghold. An area in which we are not submitting to the Holy Spirit. If Satan can continue a particular sin in the life of your family, generation after generation, then he leads your family further and further into thinking this sin is a way of life and you must stick with it. However, that is not what God tells us. God tells us that we can overcome when we allow Christ to guide our lives. Your family is not stuck and doomed to stay in a generational curse. However, to overcome takes many, many, many struggles from within yourself. It takes a full heart change toward God. And when we have this heart change, the next generation will see a different way of life giving them the option for the heart change as well. When I choose godly ways to deal with anger, my children will not see a way that is ungodly to respond to anger. Yes, they will still have to make a choice to respond in a godly way when they have feelings of anger, but my godly response is giving them an example, an option. I like to think of it this way. When you go to a restaurant to order a meal, you are there because of one reason - you are hungry. Now, there is nothing wrong with being hungry. It actually is good because it is your body signaling to you that you need nourishment. So you look at the menu and choose from what is on the menu. You can only choose from the options listed on the menu because that is what the restaurant serves. You don't even consider asking for something opposite from what is on the menu. For example, if you go to a restaurant that only serves chicken, you don't even consider asking for a steak or hamburger. This is like anger or any other sin you are struggling with in regards to the generational curse. Anger in itself is a signal to us that we need spiritual nourishment. So when we become angry, in our minds we go to the menu of options. These options have been placed on the menu based on what we have learned or seen displayed in the past. If you have never learned nor seen displayed a Godly way of responding to anger, then it isn't going to be on the menu. By displaying Godly behavior in regards to anger, it gives children an option on their response menu. This results in giving them a clear view of a choice and empowers them through the Holy Spirit to break the generational curse.

Generational curses, while they are a reality of our sinful nature, can be broken. Ask God to help you see what generational curses you have in your family? If you don't feel like you have any, please don't leave this issue without thoroughly examining before the Lord. It took years for me to discover just one generational curse. Once I discovered it, so many other issues were linked to it that addressing the curse, while it is difficult, freed me of so many other sinful ways in my life. Be humble before the Lord in this regard. He desires to lift you up. He desires that you make the right sacrifices. He desires that you stand in the gap to remove the generational curse.

### **Deepening the Walk**

**Read Ezra 5:2-17 and 6.** How did the enemy try to deter the Israelites once again? (v. 5:6-17)

What did the Israelites keep doing? (v. 5:2-5)

How did God bless them for their continual obedience - right sacrifices from the heart? (v. 6:1-15)

How did God exalt them? (v. 6:16-22)

**Read Zechariah 7:8-14.** What was the Lord requesting as a step of obedience from the people? (v. 8-10)

How did they respond? (v.11-12)

What was the result of their disobedience? (v.13-14)

*“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”*

Hosea 6:6

**Breaking a Generational Curse:** Have you recognized a generational curse in your family? Are you ready to stand in the gap and break the curse? When a generational curse is discovered in your life, these are some steps you can take in helping to break it.

1. Identify the generational curse (regenerating stronghold) to its fullest.
2. Claim the truth of 1 John 4:4 which says, *“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One Who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”*
3. Realize there is a spiritual warfare and accept your responsibility as a soldier of the King of kings to put on the armor everyday and engage the enemy on the battlefield of prayer.
4. Start with asking God to strengthen you in forgiveness. Go backwards generation upon generation and speak aloud names (if known) of people who have allowed this generational curse to continue in your family. This is an important step - do not allow the enemy to talk you out of it. Ask God to forgive them and regenerate that forgiveness in your heart. Why are you doing this? Not for them, you can't ask for forgiveness for them. But since you are standing in the gap, you can ask for God to help you. If we don't forgive the ones who have exposed us to the sin, then Satan will use that as a way to keep the stronghold. He will create bitterness in our hearts towards them. He will also use it as a way for you to excuse away your own sin. Forgive those in the past who didn't stand in the gap and allowed the generational curse on your family to continue.
5. Seek the Word of God and Godly wisdom.
6. Stand strong in prayer and pray without ceasing. Enlist other prayer warriors to join you if necessary.
7. Trust that God will respond as He has promised, and that the defeat of the enemy has already been accomplished through the blood of Christ.
8. Claim the victory from the beginning. Begin in your prayers to claim the victory and God will honor your efforts to trust in Him even before you see results in your life.

**Reflect Upon God's Desire:**

**Read Psalm 4.** What direction does this psalm give as to God's desire?

**Praise, Repent And Yield:**

Lord, I **praise** You for . . .

I **repent** of . . .

I **yield** to You . . .