

# SACRIFICE

## **Throughout the World and Throughout Time**

Man has always had a problem in any age and everywhere. He is not right with God. He seeks to get right through means and schemes of his own making. And if that is not bad enough he makes his attempts with things that are not the true God. Flowers and fruits are set before trees or images created by man's hands as if these are gods. Sometimes things are burned in sacrifice. At other times animals and even humans have been sacrificed to the gods. The divine anger is evident to man and so he tries to placate it with his puny efforts. And he tries to bribe the gods to do him favors. What a dismal scene among men this is.

God has been good to man in putting into him a conscience that accuses or else excuses. Everyone has this still small voice within him. The conscience relates to the law written on his heart. Rom. 2:14-15 Sadly, man's sinful flesh tries to obscure the law and so needs it outside of himself in stark letters that cannot be obliterated or smudged. God also has given man judgments that have fallen to indicate that he should seek after Him and not settle for unreasonable facsimiles. What Aaron did at the foot of Sinai with a golden calf is duplicated before and after, as man tries to set up a god who he can control and satisfy. But the judgments keep falling.

It is not at all the case that God has left Himself without witness. "And He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitations, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him." Acts. 17:26-27 Is it really reasonable to think that an image of a monkey represents the God who made man and gave him this bountiful earth?

"In past generations He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet He did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Acts. 14:16-17 But it was just here at Lystra where Paul said this that the people tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods in place of the "living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." How reasonable is it that these two men could be doing anything like the "living God"?

Little wonder then that "...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be know about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." Rom. 1:18-21 In their futile efforts they lay the fruit before the statue and burn the animal to appease their man-made god. Their offerings and sacrifices can do nothing toward placating the anger of God, except to satisfy for a while the inner man who knows he is not right with the divine. It is a short-lived satisfaction for soon the conscience plagues man again and a judgment falls and so it goes. How can the wrath of God be averted? How can He be pleased? Even among God's chosen people the imitations were preferred over the living and real God. At times the land was dotted with idol worship as people picked up false gods from the nations round about them. King Manasseh even burned his sons in the Valley of Hinom to a false god. 2 Chron. 33:6. They knew that the wrath of God had to be appeased, yet they chose their own way of doing it, which only brought them even more of God's wrath.

### **Predating the Law of Moses**

The whole idea of sacrifice and offerings to God was well in vogue before the Law of Moses was in effect. God worked with His people to show them in sacrifices what Christ would eventually do in sacrificing Himself to appease the wrath of God. The believers gave sacrifices and offerings in worship of God knowing He is the living Lord who has done all for them. The unbelievers have different purposes, placate their god's anger and bribe him to do good. As we look at the references below, we have to remember that there is a lot in Genesis not told us. The book covers a vast period of time from creation to the time of Joseph and touches only on what God decided to have put down in writing by Moses. For instance the command for the origination of sacrifices and offerings is not recorded, but simply that God's people did it.

Cain and Abel – Gen. 4:3-5 “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard...” If one does not have his heart in worship of God, it is a meaningless thing to give offerings, merely going through the motions. While Cain brought an offering, it was Abel who put the Lord first with the “firstlings...”

Noah – Gen. 8:20-21 “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...” Noah did not sacrifice to get something, but to thank God for the safe deliverance after the flood. The seven pairs of clean animals and seven pairs of birds were brought into the ark for the purpose of worship when the flood was over.

Abraham – Gen. 22:1-2 “After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham:' And he said, 'Here am I.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’” That Abraham went to do as God commanded is not an indication of human sacrifice among God's people, but of implicit faith in God that He knew what He was doing. Here we have burnt offerings as later in the Law of Moses. We give to God our best and dearest in many ways.

Jacob – Gen. 31:54 “...and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and called his kinsmen to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all the night on the mountain.” In the agreement between Jacob and Laban a worship of God sealed the agreement. Who else should we look to to aid us in having fulfillment of promises made and witnessing an agreement?

Gen. 46:1 “So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.” A worship of God is made for success so far and asking God for future success, as He has been so He will be.

### **The Law of Moses**

As we look over what God commanded for His people through Moses we see an emphasis on blood sacrifice which points to THE blood sacrifice of Christ, the blemish-free Lamb. “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near...For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins....we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Heb. 10:1-10 There were those foolish in Israel that thought simply by going through the motions of sacrifice all would be well, a mere outward formalism. How mistaken and shallow as they were missing the deep and abiding implications of the

sacrificial code of Moses. The blood sacrifice involved:

- a burnt offering in which the whole animal was sacrificed,
- a guilt offering in which part was burned and part left for the priest,
- a peace offering in which part was burned.

In going through Leviticus we see the following:

- Ch. 1 has the burnt offering which was to be a male without blemish and an animal designated according to the wealth of the people. It was a propitiation for general sin and demonstrates dedication.
- Ch. 2 has the meal or tribute offering which had a portion burned and the priest ate also. This was of unleavened cakes or grains. It was in general thankfulness for first fruits.
- Ch. 3 and 22:18-30 has the peace offering which could be a thank offering, vow offering, or freewill offering. It was of fat portions and was used in a fellowship meal of the priest and offerer. It was to be a male or female without blemish according to wealth. For the freewill there could be a slight blemish. This was in thankfulness generally, maybe for an unexpected blessing and for deliverance in connection with a vow. It was not a matter of sacrifices in order to get but in thankfulness for what God does.
- Ch. 4 has the sin offering which was the fat portion eaten by the priest. For a priest of congregation it was a bull; for a king it was a he-goat; for an individual a she-goat. This has to do with purification.
- Ch. 5-6:7 has the guilt offering which was the fat portion eaten by the priest. It was a ram without blemish. This was to be when there was a desecration or some objective guilt.

Even in this overview it has to be taken into account that the mere doing of the sacrifice is not what God wanted. The hypocrite was warned “to obey is better than sacrifice.” 1 Sam. 15:22 While these sacrifices and offerings were to be done continually among God's people, they pointed to the ultimate - “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Heb. 9:26 “He did this once for all when He offered up Himself.” Heb. 7:27 The blood and death, the blemish-free requirement, all pointed to the Messiah. He is that fragrant offering and sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Leviticus sixteen has the great day of Atonement on which there was that blessed double assurance of forgiveness. Is. 40:2 After Aaron was to offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, “Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.” 16:7-10 The Day of Atonement was once in the year reminding us of the once for all of Calvary. Sins are covered once for all, one day out of the year and remitted, sent away. As far as sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Heb. 9:22 There is more as in the killing of the blemish-free lamb for the Passover. As the baptizer said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

### **The Application of Sacrifice for Us**

We do not sacrifice in our lives in order to obtain from God. We already have the remission of sins and all that flows from that. We like God's people always sacrifice in thankfulness and appreciation. As

Christ was the sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God by which we have His blessing, so now we

make sacrifices acceptable and pleasing to God because of Christ's work already done. Paul refers to the Philippians support of his work as such a sacrifice. "I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." Ph. 4:18 The Philippians supported the work of Paul beyond their city. So also we give up for ourselves and for our local work to support work beyond our locality. This putting others ahead of ourselves is what Christ did in His great sacrifice.

Peter remind us that the sacrifices we make are a spiritual thing and not physical or material, "and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 2:5 So often people are materialistic and not so willing to part with their earthly goods. The spiritual must come first and we need to look at things through this viewpoint. When we do for Him and our brethren, it is a spiritual thing even though it can involve material things.

Paul dwells on this same point as Peter's "living stones" when he writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Rom. 12:1 We have been bought with a price, His holy precious blood and innocent sufferings and death. In turn we offer ourselves, not just a part or some possessions, to Him in worship. And this is a continual thing as long as we live here in the kingdom of grace until we are transferred to the kingdom of glory.

In the letter the the Hebrews it is spelled out that the spiritual means giving the physical not only to God but to our brothers also. "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." Heb. 13:16 Count others better than yourselves and do for them even before you do for yourself is hard, though that is what Christ did and beckons us to do. And then there is that other sacrifice that is hard to make due to our pride, "Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name." Heb. 13:15 To God alone must go all the glory both now and forever.