

## Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

## Prayer and Praises

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## The First Biblical Sacrifices

The first animal we see used as a covering for sin was actually for the very first sin. Adam and Eve, in direct disobedience to God, ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was only after they did this that their eyes were opened to see that they were naked (Genesis 3:7). This understanding that they were naked caused them to hide from God. So, after God explained to them the many consequences of their disobedience, God made clothing for them from the skin of an animal. While this may not be what we picture when we think of sacrifices in the Bible – it was the first time we see the death of an innocent animal covering the emptiness caused by sin.

Later we see that Cain and Able make their infamous sacrifices – Cain, his produce and Abel, the first born of his flock. After the great flood receded, Noah sacrificed animals to God. Whether specifically directed or not, it would seem that these sacrifices were an attempt to restore or strengthen relationship with God. Keep in mind, in the garden, prior to the animal having to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness, humanity and God enjoyed an unhindered and intimate relationship.

- *What must it have been like to have such a close and personal relationship with God? What must it have been like to lose that relationship?*

## The Purpose of the Lamb

In the eleventh chapter of Exodus we read about the final plague of Egypt when Moses was trying to free the Israelites. This plague, the plague of the firstborn, would see the death of every firstborn son in the families of Egypt, save the Israelites. The Israelites, to protect their families, had to follow the instructions Moses gave them. We can read these instructions in Exodus 12

*...on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats... Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast... Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it... Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.*

*"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

There are strict instructions that the lamb was to be the best, without defect. This time of remembrance and celebration became known as the Passover feast – the day that God showed favor on the Israelites by passing over them in this judgment. It is widely believed that Jesus and his disciples were sharing in a Passover meal for the Last Supper.

- *What correlations might be drawn from the Passover Lamb to Christ, the Lamb of God?*

## The Purpose of Sacrifice

When Moses was on Mount Sinai he received instructions about the construction of the tabernacle. The tabernacle would be the place where God's presence would settle and God would then be able to dwell with the people. Unfortunately, even before Moses reached the bottom of the mountain, the people sinned by creating and worshiping a golden calf (Exod. 32). Sin on the part of the Israelites threatened to end God's purpose of dwelling with them. We can see that Moses understood the value of sacrifice for the atonement of sin because Moses proposed to offer himself as a substitute for their sin.

When the tabernacle was completed the problem of sin remained and sacrifices had to be implemented to make a way for God's presence to remain. In short, the entire contents of Leviticus are in principle related to the tabernacle and to the obligations of purity that derive from it. The people could not survive alongside the tabernacle unless they respected the

holiness of God and maintained holiness among themselves. Or, to put it another way, now that the people themselves had in some sense become a dwelling place of God through the erection and consecration of the tabernacle, they had to maintain practices exhibiting the principles of God's dwelling.

Leviticus also gives us more detailed information about sacrifices including types of sacrifices as well as their requirements and purposes. Some sacrifices were not required. Their purposes were worship, commitment, and fellowship. Others were required and used as an act of repentance and seeking atonement for sin. Some were specifically for individuals while others were for the entire community. Here's a brief summary of the main types of sacrifices detailed in the Book of Leviticus:

Name	Leviticus	Type	Purpose	Mandatory?
Burnt Offering	Chap. 1	Animal ( <i>all except skin to be burned</i> )	Shows commitment and entire dedication to God	Volunteer
Meal Offering	Chap. 2	Grain	Giving back to God a portion of what one has produced through God's strength and blessing.	Volunteer
Peace or Fellowship Offering	Chap. 3	Animal	Fellowship with God and the people of God and enjoyment of God's blessings	Volunteer
Sin Offering	Chap. 4	Animal	Payment for sins committed	Required
Guilt or Trespass Offering	Chap. 5	Animal	Restitution – a means to receive forgiveness of sin	Required

The first three sacrifices listed above were all noted to be a “sweet savor unto God.” They were offerings of worship. The last two were in response to sin. As sins were committed payment was necessitated.

- *What are your initial thoughts of these expectations of the Old Testament church?*
- *Put yourself in the place of an Old Testament worshipper and subject to the laws in Leviticus... imagine what you would have to go through following the recognition of your own sin, when you wanted to praise God for a blessing, or when you wanted to enjoy fellowship in the temple. What are your thoughts as you imagine this?*

It is easy to view God as a vengeful God demanding that a penalty be paid. Often people, with this view, become resentful and rebellious toward God. It might make a difference if people understood that sacrifice is not just a means of payment – but it is the path to relationship. Without God’s presence how could we commune with God? God’s presence, however, cannot be present in the midst of sin that has not been atoned for. God’s requirement of sacrifice was made because God desires to have a relationship with humanity.

- *How easy do you think it might have been to abuse the Old Testament ritual of sacrifice for the atonement of sins in order to mimic an effort to rebuild your relationship with God (i.e. “I’m experiencing this temptation... what the heck, I’ll just kill a goat...”)?*
- *With the knowledge that Christ was the ultimate sacrifice (which we will briefly discuss next and in much more detail in the second part of this study), do you think it would be harder or easier to abuse Christ’s sacrifice for the sake of bowing to sin? Why?*

## The Need for a Once For All

But it wasn’t enough...

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

*Hebrews 10:1-4*

Animal sacrifices are ultimately inadequate. They will never be enough. The animal sacrifices cover the sins of the past, but as soon as another sin is committed the relationship with God is once again hindered. Guilt was a feeling that each worshiper carried with him or her at all times because they were constantly reminded of their need to sacrifice again. Hebrews 10 continues by showing how Christ was that ultimate sacrifice. Priests were required to perform their duties and obligations day after day, but vs. 9-10 show that “he set aside the first in order to enact the new plan—God’s way—by which we are made fit for God by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus.” (message translation)

- *Open discussion*