

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

The meaning of...

Sacrifice

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you to read the references given. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

ANIMAL SACRIFICE

Animal sacrifice is as old as the earth. Because God knew that man would not obey His commands, He made a way to forgive him. We do not know for sure that the animal God killed to make skin coats for Adam and Eve was a sacrifice for their sin. In their hearts, they had rebelled against God's rule. They had exchanged God's rule for Satan's rule and God banished them from the beautiful garden where they lived. He set an angel with a flaming sword to close the way back.

Forever after that tragic event, Adam and Eve and their descendants were cut off from God. They no longer enjoyed daily walks with their Creator. Their spirits were dead toward God. They were eternally lost, except for God's grace. Grace is God's favor shown to men who does not deserve it. He told Moses, "The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness..." (Exodus 34:6). Love and grace is at the heart of God's character.

GOD MADE A WAY

Read: Genesis 4:3-5; Heb 11:4

From reading the Scriptures, we cannot be sure if Cain had been instructed to bring a blood sacrifice to God or not. This one thing is plain, Cain's attitude was all wrong. Whereas his younger brother Abel had true faith in the living God. "Sin crouched at the door" of Cain's heart and anger rose up in his heart. One day Cain called his brother to come to the field with him; there Cain killed his brother.

God came to Cain and asked him, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain gave God a flippant and careless answer. He showed at once that he did not trust in God nor have respect for His holy name. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he exclaimed.

At once, God spoke of Abel's blood. The blood is the most precious part of God's creation. That was why He told the people of Israel, "The life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Lev 17:11).

God used two very important words: altar and atonement. An altar was a table or built up surface where a priest put a sacrifice to be offered to God (Gen 8:28). Abraham built several altars, sacrificed animals on them and called on the name of the Lord (Gen 12:8; 13:18; 33:20). God told Moses to make two altars, an "altar of burnt offering (Ex 27:1-8)," and an "altar of incense for the Tabernacle he had built" (Ex 30:1-10).

Atonement means to cover over sin so that the broken relationship between God and man, who is a sinner (Rom 3:23), could be restored. Because of Adam's sin (Romans 5:18), we are all born with a sinful nature. We sin in thought and action.

God said to Cain, "Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. Now you are under a curse..." (Gen 4:10-11). Abel's blood cried out for vengeance. But God wanted to forgive Cain, not pour out vengeance on him. So God spared Cain.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did God put Adam and Eve out of the garden (Gen 3:23-24)? **2.** Did Adam and Eve repent for what they had done? **3.** Why does God say that all men and women are sinners by birth and action? **4.** Can a man or woman do anything to save themselves?

THE TABERNACLE

Read: Hebrews 9:1-10

God met Moses in the desert where he was caring for Jethro's sheep. Moses had run away from Egypt where his people had been slaves for 400 years. Now God sent him back to deliver His people, Israel. By many miracles and His great power, God brought His people up out of Egypt. When they were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, on the Arabian peninsula, God gave Moses the Law and the pattern for making the Tabernacle which was like a big tent.

Skilled men helped Moses build the Tabernacle according to the plan God showed Moses (Ex 25:40). It was also called "the Tent of Meeting," because God met with His people there and accepted their sacrifices. The Tabernacle had three areas, an outer area where the people came to worship God. An inner room where only the priests were allowed to go and at the very back, a square room called "the Holy of Holies." Only the High Priest of Israel was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies and then not without the blood of sacrifice on his big toe, his thumb and his right ear.

The altar of burnt offering was placed in front of the entrance to the Tabernacle (Ex 40:6). It was used morning and evening for burnt offerings and meal offerings. No person could enter God's presence without first making a sacrifice or atoning for his or her sin.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did God tell Moses to build a Tabernacle? **2.** Can you name the three parts of the Tabernacle? How were the three parts used? **3.** Who served God and the people at the Tabernacle? **4.** Why did the person coming to the Tabernacle to worship God have to make a sacrifice for sin first? **5.** Did the High Priest have to do the same (Lev 16:11)?

THE HIGH PRIEST

Read: Leviticus 1:1-9

God hates sin. Man cannot come into God's presence unless his sin is first dealt with. This was the purpose of sacrifice in the Old Testament. God said, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). But He accepted the blood of an animal sacrifice in place of the sinner's death. The sinner brought his or her sacrifice to the priest who prepared it and sacrificed it on the altar. "It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Lev 1:9).

God chose Aaron, Moses' younger brother, to be the first High Priest of Israel. And he chose Aaron's four sons to be priests (Exodus 28:1-43). Aaron was the High Priest, one of the most important men in all Israel. Later God chose the tribe of Levi to help the priests in their duties. When the Israelites moved camp, the Levites folded up the Tabernacle and carried it with them on their journey to the Promised Land.

Everything about the blood sacrifice, the altar and the High Priest pointed forward to God's Son, Jesus Christ, and His work of dying for our sins on the cross. God's Law said that the animal to be sacrificed must be perfect, just as Jesus Christ, the son of God, was perfect in His deity and in His manhood (Heb 4:15). The person bringing the sacrifice must bring only the best they could afford and they must recognize that, in the death of the sacrifice, they were saying to God, "Yes, I am a sinner. I deserve to die for my sins, but this sacrificed animal died in my place and for my sins" (Lev 16:29-30). And

they identified themselves, personally, with the sacrifice (Lev 1:4). When they laid their hands on the head of the burnt offering, "it was accepted on the person's behalf to make atonement for him or her."

SET APART FOR GOD'S USE

Read: Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:18-22

God told Moses how to consecrate the people and the Book of the Covenant. To consecrate means to set apart for God's holy use. When Moses sprinkled the blood of sacrifice on the people he said, "This is the blood of the covenant the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words," and the people replied, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey" (Ex 24:7-8).

They could only make such a promise after they had heard Moses repeat every commandment written in the Law. The Law embodied all that God had promised to Abraham (Gen 12:2-3), and to King David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). We might think of it as the Old Covenant delivered in detail as a legal document. Everyone who lived under it was bound by its demands (Deut 6:24-25).

When God brought in the New Covenant (Heb 10:15-18), "The former regulation was set aside because it was weak and useless (for the Law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God" (Heb 7:18-19).

GOD'S JUSTICE

God's grace provided the Old Testament ritual of priest, sacrifice and atonement. And by making a blood sacrifice the sin of the sinner was covered over so that God saw only the blood. The sinner who obeyed and offered the sacrifices God required enjoyed God's forgiveness and the blessings of a relationship with Him. Their sins were covered, but their guilt remained. So it was that the sins of the Old Testament peoples were rolled forward to the time of Jesus Christ. There on the cross the sins of the whole world were put on Jesus who, in His death and resurrection, removed them from God's sight forever (John 1:29; Hebrews 9:9).

Only when Christ died for our sins, was God's justice served "because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4). Atonement was possible because in His forbearance God has passed over the sins that had been committed under the Old Covenant (Acts 17:30; Rom 3:25). His justice was finally satisfied when Jesus Christ offered His own sinless blood on the altar in heaven. "He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9 :12). The work He had come to do on earth was finished.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews brings out the same thought in his opening verses: Speaking of Jesus Christ, the Son, the radiance of God's glory, he said, "After He (Jesus Christ) had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 1:3b). And through Jesus, God will present all believers "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

MANY SACRIFICES

Read: Leviticus 3:1-5

The book of Leviticus explains the many sacrifices God told the people of Israel to make. It amazes us! How could they have enough animals and time to make these many sacrifices? The sacrifices can be listed as:

- The burnt offering (Lev 1:1 – 1 :17)
- The meal offering (Lev 2:1-14; 6:14-23).

- The sin offering (4:1-35; 6:24-30).
- The trespass offering (Lev 5:14 to 6:7; 7:1-6).
- The peace offering or fellowship offering (Lev 3:1-17; 7:11-24).

God told Moses which animals could be offered as a sacrifice and which ones were 'unclean' (Lev 11:41-45). The people had no doctors or medicines, so some of God's laws were given to protect their health.

The burnt offering was made every morning and evening. The whole sacrifice was burned on the altar. It was a sacrifice for sin and pointed to Christ's sacrifice which make a complete atonement for the sins of the world (2 Cor 5:21), once for all.

The meal offering was an offering of grain. It was prepared like a meal we would eat. The meal offering was a symbol of man offering to God the holy living He demanded (Lev 11:45). Poor people could present a meal offering. A sin offering and a burnt offering or peace offering was made at the same time (Num 15:1-16).

Priests and people must be holy in their living. When God gave His people these laws He said, "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev 11:44-45). God repeated the same command in the New Testament (1 Peter 1:16).

THE SIN OFFERING

The sin offering, also called a guilt or trespass offering (Lev 5:15) was made for sins of ignorance or sins where the person repented (Lev 6:24-30). It was a blood sacrifice burned on the altar. The priest took some of the blood and poured it out at the base of the altar.

THE PEACE OFFERING

Read: Leviticus 7:1-18

This offering is more often called a "fellowship offering." It could be made as the result of a vow or as a freewill offering (Lev 7:16). Some of the cakes or bread presented to the Lord were made without yeast. The priest and people ate these 'cakes' on the day they were offered.

HOW WERE MEN SAVED?

Men and women of Israel were saved by faith, just as we are. Faith must be in God. Abraham had faith. He "believed the Lord, and God credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). Faith does not stand alone. It must produce works of faith, or we can doubt if it is genuine (James 2:14-20). "This (faith) is what the ancients were commended for" (Heb 11:2).

In Hebrews 11, the writer gives a list of Old Testament saints who had faith. But more than that, their faith moved them to action. They learned to know and love God and to follow His commands. Some suffered and died for their faith and their works.

A LIVING SACRIFICE

Read: Romans 12:1-2

Paul pointed men to God's greatness and glory. When we see His holiness and glory, we fall before Him in worship (Dan 10:7-8). Our hearts bow in worship before His great love, majesty and power (Is 6; Rev 1:17). Our hearts yield to His Holy Spirit and we offer our bodies (soul and spirit) to Him. This is true worship (John 4:23).

Paul wrote to his brothers in the faith. He said God asks only two things of every Christian. He asks us to trust Him fully and to yield our whole lives to His will and purpose. God has a perfect plan for each one (Jer 29:11), but we only find that plan and walk in it as we 'offer ourselves, as living sacrifices' (12:1).

Paul urged the Christians in Rome to "offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world..." (Rom 12:1-2). Be different:

- Offering our bodies and our minds to the Spirit's control.
- Standing firm against the pressures of the world around us.
- Asking God to help us think His thoughts (Phil 2:5; 4:8-9).
- Being aware of the enemy - false pride and false humility (12:3). Knowing your gifts and ask God how He wants to use them to build up the body of Christ, the Christian Church.

THE OLD SYSTEM PASSED AWAY

Under the Old Covenant God's people brought animals to sacrifice. They presented the animal to God. When Jesus Christ made the one final sacrifice for sin, the old system of animal sacrifice was not needed any more, it ceased and passed away (Heb 8:13).

Now God asks all believers to "offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – " (Rom 12:1). All sacrifices, made under the law, were chosen with great care. Every animal had to be without any faults (Ex 12:5). And God consumed what He received on the altar (Judges 6:21). Often, fire fell from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, even licking up the water in the trench Elijah made around the altar (1 Kings 18:38). When we truly worship, God receives all that we offer.

As we offer ourselves, God takes and uses us in His service. We will be "vessels unto honor" in His house (2 Tim 2:20). He will always take the clean vessel, the clean sacrifice, and use that person to His glory.

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE BELIEVER

Adam and Eve were created "with true (perfect) righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). They were the only human beings ever to be without sin. They were sinless until they rebelled against God. When they sinned, Adam and Eve were cut off from God. Now every person is born with Adam's sin nature (Rom 3:23).

Ever since that day, God has been working to bring men and women back to Himself. Our sin nature, inherited from Adam, shuts us outside of God's Kingdom. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "You were dead in transgressions and sins..." (Eph 2:1).

Only God, in His grace, could stir a desire in our dead spirits to reach out to Him. Like Paul we cry out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death" (Rom 7:28)? The answer is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin. His blood paid the ransom for our sin, and His blood keeps on paying the ransom for our sins, as we confess them to God (1 John 1:9).

THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

Read: 1 Peter 2:4-10

God told Moses to speak to the people and say, ". . . the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). John, in The Revelation spoke of Christ when he said, "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father – to Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev 1:5-6).

Paul prayed that God Himself would work in the believer's lives to sanctify them, not just a little, but "through and through" (1 Thess 5:23). Sanctify here means to be set apart to live a holy life. Only God, working by His Spirit can sanctify a person.

This is God's purpose in calling men and women to Himself by the preaching of the gospel (1 Thess 4:7). The call to receive Christ, once accepted, puts us under an obligation to let God work His will and purpose in our lives to the very end.

Now, all who love the Lord Jesus and are saved by His blood are "priests unto God." Peter wrote, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

TALK ABOUT 1. What does it mean to be a "priest unto God?" **2.** Who makes men priests? **3.** What are God's priests told to do (Heb 13:15)? **4.** Do you pray for your leaders (Heb 13:17)?

THE HIGH PLACES OF CANAAN

From the earliest time, heathen nations chose the tops of mountains as places of worship. On the top of every high hill, they erected altars to their heathen gods. In Canaan, these "high places" occupied the top of every high hill and mountain. Places of heathen worship still crowd the tops of mountains.

Israel was told not to worship at these 'shrines.' God told His people to destroy them (Deut 7:25-26; 12:2-3, 11-14). The people did not obey the Lord's command (Judges 6). Years later, the prophets were still speaking against the high places in Israel (Isa 65:7; Ezek 6:13)

Israel worshipped at the "high places" against the command of God. Good kings like Josiah and Hezekiah fought hard to destroy them (2 Kings 23). After the time of Josiah, there is no more record of Israelites worshipping at the "high places."

JESUS SAID, "IT IS FINISHED."

For God to turn history back to the Law would be to deny the work His Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth to do. As Jesus was dying on the cross, in His last breath, He cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30). He had completed the commission, the work, the Father had sent Him into the world to do. Nothing more needed to be done.

In the Greek language, one word takes the place of the three English words. It is the Greek word "teleios." Bankers used the same Greek word. When a debtor made the last and final payment on a debt they owed, the banker stamped the document with the word "teleios" or "Paid in full."

The same word was used for the lamb chosen for the Passover sacrifice. When used for the Passover lamb, the word had the meaning of "perfect." The lamb had to be kept and carefully watched for fourteen days. If the lamb was declared "perfect" it was offered as a sacrifice to God for the sins of the people. Jesus Christ was the "perfect Lamb of God" who took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). He had been "tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

All world religions demand that men do, do, do, but God's word tells us that all has been done, done, done! There is nothing more that you or I can do to satisfy God's demands. Jesus Christ did it all for us when He died on the cross. Let us receive His saving work by faith. Don't so much as entertain the thought that God will turn the clock back to the time when men were under the curse of the law. To believe that would be an insult to Jesus Christ and nullify or make of no effect His saving work.

TALK ABOUT 1. What 'work' did God the father send the Son to do? **2.** What do all the world's religions tell men? **3.** Why did Jesus say, "It is finished" (John 19:30)? What was finished?

A NEW AND BETTER WAY

Read: Hebrews 8:3-13

Man's only hope lay ahead. God would make a new and better way. God demanded righteousness, but man failed to achieve righteousness by keeping the Law. Many good Jews tried and tried hard, but failed and failed again. The Apostle Paul was one of them.

Speaking of the Jews Paul said, "They pursued a law of righteousness, but did not attain it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as it were by works. They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone'," which was Jesus Christ (Rom 9:30-33).

God promised a great change in the way He would accept men and women. He got no pleasure from sacrifices and offerings "because it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin" (Heb 10:4).

"The Law – rules, regulations, sacrifices and offerings – was only a shadow of the good things that were coming," the writer said, "and not the realities themselves. For this reason it (the Law) can never...make perfect those who draw near to worship" (Heb 10:1). The Law was like a big stick that threatened all who broke it. It did not help men and women to obey.

The prophet Jeremiah told how God would change the rules. God told Jeremiah, "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Heb 8:8). The nation represented all of God's people. God declared, "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts... and they will know Me... for I will forgive their wickedness..." (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Because Jesus died, God is able to acquit or pardon the sinner. Justification is God's free gift. He pronounces those who receive Jesus Christ as "not guilty." Paul said, "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23). And "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Now God freely forgives the sins of those who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Blood had to be shed to atone for sin. For God has said, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). One trespass [Adam] meant death; one death [Jesus Christ] brought life!

MEN COME TO CHRIST ONE BY ONE

Under the Old Covenant God sought a relationship with the nation of Israel. He spoke to them as one people and they worshipped Him as one people. When the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement with the blood of sacrifice, he atoned for the sins of the nation (Lev 16).

Yet each person was required to participate as a part of the whole. When one person sinned, all Israel sinned. But God was there to forgive their sin whenever they repented and turned to Him with a blood sacrifice, as He had commanded. His love was extended to all men Jew and Gentile alike. Indeed, many Gentiles came into the Kingdom. One of the most notable of these was Rahab, who sheltered the Israeli spies when they went to look over the city of Jericho (Joshua 2:1-21).

TALK ABOUT 1. Does God love everyone the same? **2.** Did Gentiles have the same opportunity to hear about the living God? **3.** What special blessings did the Jews receive (Rom 9:1-5)? **4.** Have you accepted God's grace and are your sins atoned for?

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