

The Mystery of Sacrifice

Introduction

1. Why does God demand animal sacrifice? (Bloodthirsty? Primitive? Symbolic?)
2. Why does Christ offer himself as a “sacrifice”? (Sadistic Father? Atonement?)
3. What is the relationship between *sacrifice* and *the ministerial priesthood*?
4. The Key: go back to the *Jewish roots* of sacrifice—the book of Leviticus!

The Concept of Sacrifice¹

1. Twofold Meaning of Sacrifice²
 - a. Symbolic: *ritualized self-offering*
 - b. Typological: *prefigure* the Messianic age
2. Sacrifice: the “center” of the Old Testament (Edersheim 75)
3. Twofold Effects of Sacrifice:
 - a. Representation: sacrifice represents the offerer (Edersheim 76)
 - b. Mediation: between God and man (participation in the divine)
4. Symbolism of Burning (Edersheim 84-85)
 - a. Acceptance by God: fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:20-39; 2 Chron 7:1)

To you, O Lord, *I lift up my soul* (Hebrew *nephesh*)... (Psalm 25:1)

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? *He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul* (Hebrew *nephesh*) *to what is false*, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who *seek the face of the God of Jacob* (Psalm 24:3-6)

The Act of Sacrifice

1. Five Kinds of Animals for Sacrifice (Edersheim 78-79)
 - a. Oxen
 - b. Sheep
 - c. Goats
 - d. Turtle-doves
 - e. Young Pigeons
2. Role of the Layman:
 - a. Lay Hands on the Animal
 - b. Confess Sins to the Priest (cf. *Confiteor*, see Edersheim 81-82)
 - c. Slay the Victim (slit the throat)
 - d. Skin the Animal and Cut Up the Animal in pieces, washing the innards
3. Role of the Priest:
 - a. Catch the blood in gold/silver basin
 - b. Sprinkle the blood on the altar
 - c. Light altar fire: offer the cut pieces at the altar by burning

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1994).

² St. Thomas Aquinas: “Bodily sacrifices denote the inward sacrifice of the heart, whereby man offers his soul to God... The ceremonies of the Old Law had a twofold cause, viz., a literal cause, according as they were intended for Divine worship; and a figurative or mystical cause, according as they were intended to foreshadow Christ...” (*Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 102, A. 3)

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Sacrifices that *Express Communion with God*

1. The Whole Burnt Offering (*'Olah*) (Leviticus 1)

1. Definition: “whole-burnt offering” = ascending to God (Heb *'olah*; Latin *holocaust*)
2. Elements: unblemished male lamb, with bread and wine
3. Symbolism: total self-surrender to God
4. Example: *Tamid*: daily morning and evening sacrifice (Exod 29:38-46)

“Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: *two lambs a year old day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening*; and with the first lamb a tenth measure of *fine flour* mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of *a hin of wine* for a libation. And the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and shall offer with it *a cereal offering and its libation*, as in the morning, for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. It shall be *a continual burnt offering* (Heb *tamid*) throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where *I will meet with you, to speak there to you*. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; *Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests* (Hebrew *kohanim*). (Exodus 29:38-44)

2. The Bread-Offering (*Minhah*) (Leviticus 2)

1. Definition: often called “meat” or “cereal” offering (Hebrew *minhah*, “gift”)
2. Elements:
 - a. Unleavened Bread: made with fine corn flour, sometimes as “wafers”
 - b. Oil: anointed with oil in the shape of a K or a cross (later rabbinic tradition)
 - c. Wine: poured out with all bread-offerings
3. Symbolism: a “gift” of thanksgiving to God
4. Examples:
 - a. Bread of the Presence: 12 loaves (Exod 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:1-8)
 - b. Bread at Priestly Ordination (Lev 6:19-22; 8:25-29)
 - c. The Perfect Sacrifice of the Gentiles (Mal 1:11; cf. Lev 6:20)

The Lord said to Moses, “Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for *the lamp*, that a light may be kept burning continually... “And you shall take fine flour, and bake *twelve cakes of it*... [= Bread of the Presence] And you shall set them in two rows, six in a row, upon *the table of pure gold*. And you shall put pure frankincense with each row, that it may go with the bread as *a memorial portion* to be offered by fire to the Lord. Every sabbath day Aaron shall set it in order before the Lord continually on behalf of the people of Israel *as a covenant for ever*. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place...” (Leviticus 24:1-9)

Oh... that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering* (Hebrew *minhah*); for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:10-11)

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3. The Peace Offerings (Hb *Zebah Shelamim*) (Leviticus 3)

1. Definition: “offering of peace” (Hb *zebah shelamim*)
2. Element:
 - a. Unblemished animal, male or female
 - b. Food and Drink offering (cf. Lev 7:11)
3. Symbolism:
 - a. Joyful communion with God
 - b. Expressed in sacrificial communion meal (cf. Exodus 24)
4. Examples:
 - a. The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12-13)
 - b. Covenant Sacrifices at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:1-8)
 - c. *Todah* Sacrifice: “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Lev 7:11)
 - d. Later Rabbinic Tradition: Sole Sacrifice of the Messianic Age

“And this is *the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings* which one may offer to the Lord. If he offers it *for a thanksgiving* (Hebrew *tōdah*), then he shall offer with the thank offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well mixed with oil. With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with cakes of leavened bread. And of such he shall offer one cake from each offering, as an offering to the Lord; it shall belong to the priest who throws the blood of the peace offerings. *And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it until the morning.* (Leviticus 7:11-15)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt... “*Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household; and if the household is too small for a lamb, then a man and his neighbor next to his house shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.* ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats; and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. ⁷ Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. *They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.* Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. *And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.* In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s Passover. (Exodus 12:1-11)

*In the Time to Come all sacrifices will be annulled, but that of Thanksgiving (todah) will not be annulled, and all prayers will be annulled, but [that of] Thanksgiving (tōdah) will not be annulled. This is indicated by what is written... “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts” (Jer 33:11). (Leviticus Rabbah 9.7).*³

³ Translation H. Freedman and M. Simon, *Midrash Rabbah* (9 vols.; London: Soncino, 1983), 4.114.

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Sacrifices that *Restore* Communion with God

The Sin Offering (*Hattath*) (Leviticus 4)

1. Definition:
 - a. “Sin Offering” or “Sin” (Hebrew *hattath*)
 - b. Atonement for the person of the offender (Edersheim 94)
2. Elements:
 - a. Sacrificial animal (bull, goat, etc.)
 - b. Laying of hands on the animal (self-representation/consecration/substitution)
 - c. Blood poured out, fat burned on the altar
 - d. Rest of animal burned outside the camp, where ashes thrown
3. Symbolism:
 - a. Forgiveness of sins: atonement made for the person of the offender (Lev 4:20)
 - b. Covenant with God restored (blood sprinkled *seven* times in front of Veil)
 - c. Nothing joyous: no oil or frankincense brought with sacrifice
4. Prerequisites: repentance from sin
5. Examples: *Yom Kippur* Sacrifice: the “Day of Atonement” (Lev 16:3)

“Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood within the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat; thus he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions, all their sins.... There shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he enters to make atonement in the holy place... And he shall sprinkle some of the blood upon it [the altar] with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel. And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:15-22)

5. The Guilt Offering (‘*Asham*) (Leviticus 5-6)

1. Definition:
 - a. “Guilt/Trespass” Offering (Hb *’asham*)
 - b. Sub-category of Sin-Offering
 - c. Atonement for “one specific offense” (Edersheim 94)
 - c. Contraction of uncleanness; rash oath; weakness, etc.
2. Symbolism:
 - a. Very Similar to sin-offering
 - b. Penance for impurity or unwitting sin (Lev 5:14)
2. Examples:
 - a. Cleansing of a healed leper (Lev 14)
 - b. Penance made after restitution of stolen goods (Lev 6:1-17)

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The Lord said to Moses, “If any one sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found what was lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things which men do and sin therein, when one has sinned and become guilty, *he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by oppression, or the deposit which was committed to him, or the lost thing which he found,*⁵ *or anything about which he has sworn falsely; he shall restore it in full, and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs,* on the day of his *guilt offering* (Hebrew *’asham*)⁶ And he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the Lord... and the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things which one may do and thereby become guilty.” (Leviticus 6:1-6)

4. The Eucharist, the Perfect Sacrifice

The *Catechism* on the Sacrifice of Christ

This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it *completes* and *surpasses* all other sacrifices. (CCC 614)

1. The Eucharist as Whole Burnt Offering (*Tamid*)

Epiclesis: “Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, *by sending down your Spirit upon them* like the dewfall so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. The Eucharist as a Bread Offering

Eucharistic Prayer III: “You give life to all things and make them holy, and you never cease to gather a people to yourself, *so that from the rising of the sun to its setting a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name.*” (cf. Mal 1:11)

3. The Eucharist as a Peace Offering

Communion Rite: Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, *my peace I give you*, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and gracious grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will. (cf. John 14:27)

4. The Eucharist as a Sin Offering

Communion Rite: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who *takes away the sins of the world*. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. (Cf. John 1:29)

5. The Eucharist as a Guilt Offering

Eucharistic Prayer I: Remember also, Lord, your servants N. and N., who have gone before us with the sign of faith and rest in the sleep of peace. Grant them, O Lord, we pray, and all who sleep in Christ a place of refreshment, light, and peace. (cf. Council of Trent, Denzinger 1743)

As sacrifice, the Eucharist is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead and to obtain spiritual or temporal benefits from God. (CCC 1414)