

The Sanctuary Sacrifices

Lesson #3 for October 19, 2013

Scriptures: Genesis 3:9-21; 22:1-19; Exodus 12:21-27; Leviticus 2:1-3; 17:10-11; Philippians 4:18.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to understand why sacrifices were required in the Old Testament and what they might mean for our lives today. We no longer offer animal sacrifices. For that matter, we no longer offer any of the sacrifices that were designated in Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers. Does that mean that those sacrifices have no meaning for us in the Christian era? Read Numbers 15:27-31. Notice that this says, "If you offer sacrifices...." And multiple places in Leviticus it says, "When [or if] you offer sacrifices...." (Leviticus 1:2,10,14; 2:1; 3:1; etc.) This suggests that sacrifices were not the ideal and were not God's original plan. Multiple texts suggest that God did not want animal sacrifices. Read Micah 6:6-8 and see #9 below. Sacrifices were only for unintentional sins!

Notice some important points about the sacrificial system:

- 1) The sacrificial offerings were ordained by God to be to man a perpetual reminder and a penitential acknowledgment of his sin and a confession of his faith in the promised Redeemer. **They were intended to impress upon the fallen race the solemn truth that it was sin that caused death.** [Do we really believe that?] To Adam, the offering of the first sacrifice was a most painful ceremony. His hand must be raised to take life, which only God could give. It was the first time he had ever witnessed death, and he knew that had he been obedient to God, there would have been no death of man or beast. As he slew the innocent victim, he trembled at the thought that his sin must shed the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. This scene gave him a deeper and more vivid sense of the greatness of his transgression, which nothing but the death of God's dear Son could expiate. And he marveled at the infinite goodness that would give such a ransom to save the guilty. A star of hope illumined the dark and terrible future and relieved it of its utter desolation. (PP 68.1) [Content in brackets is supplied.]
2. Notice particularly that Adam himself slew that first lamb. Many Christian scholars believe that the skin(s) from that (or those) sacrifice(s) were used to clothe Adam and Eve. But, if that is the case, how many skins were necessary? And skins, at least as we know them now, become dried out and very unusable as clothing in a short period of time unless they are properly cured and tanned. Did God teach Adam and Eve all of those processes? Or, did God possibly show them how to make clothing from the wool instead of the skins?
3. Some Christian scholars have suggested that the entire sacrificial system was adopted from paganism and brought into the Jewish system because it was what the people were familiar with. This, of course, is completely contrary to the above quotation.

- 2) It is very important to notice what Ellen White said after the above paragraph.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but **it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.** To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto [69] Me." John 12:31-32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law

of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. (PP 68.2)

4. Immediately after speaking about Adam sacrificing that first lamb, why did Ellen White talk about the great controversy? Isn't it clear that some very important lessons were supposed to be learned from that whole process? Notice her comment, "They were intended to impress upon the fallen race the solemn truth that it was sin that caused death." Is that the lesson we are supposed to learn today? **How many of us truly believe that sin leads to death? How many Christians still believe that God slays or even tortures the wicked?**
5. What does it take to reveal the nature and results of sin? What does it take to teach us that sin is deadly? Do we really believe that? Why is sin deadly? What is the only "remedy" for sin? There is no way we can undo past sins. They are a permanent part of history. God will never forget about them. His memory is faultless. However, if we agree to His way of dealing with them, He chooses not to recall them any more! (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:16-18) Satan surely remembers them. And so do we!
 - 3) The idea of sacrifice suggests that we give up something that is precious to us. But, those first lambs that were sacrificed did not belong to Adam, and he had probably not had any special relationship with them in the past. So, how could it have been a sacrifice for him? Or, were those lambs pets of the couple?
 - 4) It is very clear that Adam and Eve were significantly affected by taking the life or lives of those first animals. What are we supposed to learn from that? The entire universe was watching all of those events from the time of Eve's sin all the way through to the sacrifice of those first lambs. The sacrifice of the lambs did not make all those beings or God forget what had happened! **No matter how costly, sacrifices do not undo our past sins.** And when we talk about the sanctuary system, we need to recognize that it is impossible to transfer a person's sins to an animal and somehow make that animal guilty of what we have done.
7. What are we supposed to learn from the entire sanctuary system? In symbol, in figure, the sins of a human being were transferred to the lamb which was then sacrificed, and its blood sprinkled on the altar and in the tabernacle. On the Day of Atonement, those sins were, in figure, again picked up by the high priest and carried into the most holy place; and then, after the high priest had met with God, those sins were carried out and placed on the head of the scapegoat. The scapegoat was then taken by a chosen individual to a distant place where it could never find its way back to the camp of the Israelites. No doubt, it would be consumed by some wild animal or die of starvation. What would you do if you woke up the next morning after the Day of Atonement and found that goat in your tent?
8. What was the lesson to be learned? God has made provision for our sins to be dealt with. It is important to notice that while we focus on the blood and the life of the lamb, there were other kinds of offerings that were also acceptable. See Exodus 12:21-27; Leviticus 2:1-3; Exodus 25:2-7; and Leviticus 4:27-31. These sacrificial offerings were given at different times for different purposes.
 - 5) In light of all of the above, it seems clear that the purpose of these sacrifices was to convince people to stop sinning and that sin is deadly. There is no sacrifice that can undo past sins. And what does the Bible say about the deadliness of sin? Read Genesis 2:15-17; Isaiah 59:2; and Romans 6:23.
9. When they were asked to sacrifice something of value because of their sins, how was that supposed to affect them? It is clear from the Old Testament experience that it was never God's intention that sacrifices could just be offered over and over again as often as one felt like he wanted to sin! In fact, God reached the place where He was said He was sick of all those sacrifices. (**Isaiah 1:10-20**; 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 51:16-17; Hosea 6:6; **Micah 6:6-8**; Matthew 9:13; Matthew 12:7) What do these verses tell us about God?
10. In light of all this, the only conclusion that I believe we can reasonably come to is that the

purpose of sacrifices was to convince people to stop sinning because sin is deadly. To get the point across, did God need to make the sacrifice painful?

11. Consider the experience of Abraham and Isaac. (Genesis 22) Once again, Ellen White has some very significant words to say about that experience.

It was to impress Abraham's mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man's redemption. No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

Wasn't Abraham's sacrifice of his son a way to demonstrate the seriousness of sin?

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but **it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds.** The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. **All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unflinching obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.**

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 154.3-155.2)

12. Notice once again that Ellen White turned immediately from the local experience to talking about the great controversy and the larger view involving the entire universe. Why was that?

Our *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* goes on to emphasize two points.

Concerning the sacrifice, Abraham understood **two essential principles.**

First, no one but God Himself can bring the true sacrifice and the means of salvation. **It is the Lord who will, who must, provide.** Abraham eternalizes this principle by naming the place “YHWH Jireh,” which means “The-LORD-Will-Provide.” **Second, the actual sacrifice is substitutional**, one that saves Isaac’s life. The ram is offered “in the place of” Isaac (*Gen. 22:13, NASB*). That animal, which God provided, prefigures the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, on whom “the Lord has laid . . . the iniquity of us all” (*Isa. 53:6, 7; Acts 8:32, NKJV*).

13. Does this suggest that somehow God’s offering of His Son does something about our sins after they have been committed? Or, is He trying to convince us that we need to stop sinning? And in what sense was His death substitutional? It is true that if Christ had not come and lived and died to teach us the truth about God, we all would die. Thus, His life makes it possible for us to live; in that sense it is substitutional. But, the questions which arise are these: Does the death of Christ actually do anything about my past sins? Does it undo them? Of course not! Does it convince me that continuing to commit sin is a bad idea? Hopefully! Isn’t that the whole point? In the case of Abraham, he was not able to sleep for three days and three nights as he walked and at night prayed to God about that impending sacrifice. (*Patriarchs and Prophets 151.3*) Abraham went through a great deal of anguish during that time. Did God enjoy that? Why would He want someone to go through such an experience? Did it have something to do with the fact that Abraham had lied about his wife on several previous occasions? And what about us? What must God do to convince us to give up our favorite sins?

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man’s judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe. He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give. (*Steps to Christ 30.1*)

14. There are those who believe that the secret to forgiveness of sins is blood. Leviticus 17:10-11 suggests that the life is in the blood. In actual fact, a pathological examination of blood reveals that some of the components of blood are already dead! Red blood cells have been de-nucleated meaning that they do their job of carrying oxygen for about three months and then deteriorate and have to be replaced. Although they are technically living, they cannot replicate or reproduce. So, what is the meaning of suggesting that life is in the blood?
15. To the ancient Israelites, it seemed like the obvious answer. When an animal or human being was seriously injured and blood began to pour out, it usually was not long before that creature was dead. The obvious conclusion was that life was in the blood. Does that have anything to do with the fact that they were forbidden from eating blood? (*Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 7:26-27; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16,23; 15:23*)
16. In passing, is it interesting to notice that the flavor of meat is in the waste products found in the blood. If one removes the blood, meat has essentially no flavor. By removing the blood, was it God’s intention that they not develop a taste for meat or for blood itself?
17. Virtually all pagan religions have some kind of sacrifice to appease their gods. Is this substantially different from the Hebrew Christian understanding of sacrifice? Notice that in the case of Judaism and Christianity, it is God who offers the sacrifice. It is He who came and lived and died to try to impress upon us the importance of living a righteous life and abandoning sin.

18. Read Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16; and 1 Peter 2:5. Romans 12 is particularly significant in this context because it says we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. What do those words imply? Clearly, that is a bloodless sacrifice! God is not asking us to die. What God wants is for His children to live lives as close as possible to the life Jesus lived so as to be examples to the world so this great controversy and this sin-filled world can be brought to a conclusion!
19. Thus, the life of Christ is a huge eternal message to teach us the importance of avoiding the deadly sins that we love so much, sacrificing them including our selfishness and our pride so that we are able to live the kind of lives which Christ lived while He was here on this earth. Christ's death on the cross was not just some ceremonial way to take care of our past sins so we can keep on committing them! His life was to teach us how to live lives without sinning.
20. Once again, we need to notice these words from Ellen White about the ultimate consequences of actually doing that.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. (*Desire of Ages* 668.3)

21. As Seventh-day Adventists, we regard ourselves as God's true people who have the truth for the world in its final stages. Does that make us proud? Does that make us want to hold onto the truth and not share it? Do we recognize that we have been given this enormous treasure of truth not to hoard it but rather to share it?

A seminary professor tells the experience of when she reluctantly accompanied her husband through the conflict-torn region of the Holy Land to the top of Mount Gerazim at Passover time. Here, the few surviving Samaritans on earth still sacrifice Passover lambs. As the lambs were led to the slaughter, she averted her eyes. But at the last minute, she looked. How utterly awful their deaths were. As she beheld the innocent creatures struggling against the knife, her soul revolted against the callousness of the priest, who was offering the sacrifice. But even more, she found revolting the whole idea of the sacrificial system. Why did innocent animals have to die to point forward to the death of Jesus? On the way back that night, in the light of the full Passover moon, she poured out her bitterness against God for the awfulness of the animal sacrifices until suddenly light from heaven penetrated her darkened mind. She finally began to understand the point: sin is so awful that it cost the life of the innocent Lamb of God. This Sacrifice was the only way that God could get people with their hardened human hearts to see how terrible sin was, how costly our salvation is.

Could you confess your sins on the head of a lamb and then cut its throat and watch it die? *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 36

22. So, what is your understanding of the substitutionary aspect of the atonement? What do you think of the following seven points made in the *Teacher's Guide*, p. 39?

Among the many sacrifices in the Levitical system, perhaps none provides such a comprehensive, advance presentation of the sacrifice of Christ as the multifaceted Passover service. Ponder the following points:

1. Foundational significance: Passover marks the "beginning of months" (*Exod. 12:2*).
2. Focus on the lamb (a symbol of Jesus) (*Exod. 12:3, John 1:29*).

3. Perfect timing (*Exod. 12:5, John 13:1, 18:28, 19:14*): Jesus died at 3:00 P.M. on the fourteenth day of Nisan, just as the first Passover lambs were to be slain.
4. A perfect, complete sacrifice (*Exod. 12:5, 46; 1 Pet. 1:19; John 19:33, 36*).
5. An ample, all-inclusive sacrifice (*Exod. 12:4; John 3:16; Romans 3:23, 24; 5:6, 8, 18; 1 Tim. 4:10*).
6. Personal appropriation of the sacrifice (*Exod. 12:7-8; John 6:53; 1 John 1:7, 9*).
7. Propitiatory, substitutionary sacrifice. The lamb was to be “roasted in fire” (*Exod. 12:8, NKJV*). The fires of divine wrath were poured out upon Jesus, as He took upon Himself the sins of the world and received the punishment we deserved.

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