

Do Sacrifices Provide Forgiveness?

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“But he [the Israelite] was well aware that the only reason God had given for 'setting His love upon' His people was, simply, 'because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers'. The Christian could wish for no clearer statement, *mutatis mutandis*, of his own acceptance ...

“So it was with the sacrifices in general. The very means of making atonement was His gift to man: 'the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls'. **The theology of this is essentially that of grace:** its crowning statement is that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son'.” (F.D. Kidner, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, page 23-4) [emphasis mine]

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Introductory Comments

Many in the Christian community completely overlook the importance of offerings and sacrifices as given in the Torah. To them it is completely unimportant or done away as if to be of no significance and thus of little need for exploration or study.

Others do understand the spiritual significance of both offerings and blood sacrifices as typological of different aspects of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Many fine books and papers have been produced on this essential doctrine.

An excellent overview of the sacrificial system may be viewed at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sacrifice-in-the-old-testament-2/> Refer also to the **Appendices *Sacrifice in Ancient Israel* and "*Sacrifice*," *Smith's Bible Dictionary*.**

I must agree with Harold Rowley's claim:

"To many readers of the Old Testament this has little meaning to-day, since animal sacrifice has long ceased for the Jews, while for the Christians it is superseded. Yet it clearly played an important part in the life of ancient Israel, and it demands more study from those who would understand the Old Testament than is commonly given to it." ("The Meaning of Sacrifice in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the Johns Ryland Library* (vol. 33), 1950:74)

"... it is clear that in the thought of the Old Testament sacrifice is not the only organ of atonement. To remember this is of the first importance in any study of sacrifice, or of the treatment of sin in the Old Testament." (Rowley 1950:98)¹

It is this lack of interest in this intense subject that has led to all sorts of assumptions ranging from the sacrifices are 'fulfilled' and therefore 'done away,' to not accepting the clear prophecies that the Temple system and its associated sacrifices will be restored during the Millennial reign of the Messiah. Ezekiel 40-48 is very clear on this yet ignored or its obvious implication denied.

However, there are specialists who have provided indepth study on the subject that we can leverage off, for example Hullinger in his article "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48" proclaims that the Old Testament sacrifices and that of Christ

¹ "The second distinction between synagogue and temple is cult. The cult of the temple was sacrifice, i.e. the slaughter, roasting and eating of animals. It was a bloody affair; as the rabbis say, 'It is a glory for the sons of Aaron that they walk in blood up to their ankles.'

The second distinction between synagogue and temple is cult. The cult of the temple was sacrifice, i.e. the slaughter, roasting and eating of animals. **It was a bloody affair; as the rabbis say, 'It is a glory for the sons of Aaron that they walk in blood up to their ankles.'** [9] (Footnote 9 states: "B. Pesabim 65b, a reference I owe to Professor D. W. Halivni." (Cohen 199:301)

"Prayer had little or no official place [in the offerings]. Neither Leviticus nor Numbers nor Deuteronomy nor Ezekiel nor the Qumran Temple Scroll nor Philo nor Josephus mentions prayer as an integral part of the sacrificial cult. The '*asam*' offering was accompanied by a 'confession', in which the person who brought the sacrifice stated the trespass for which he sought atonement (Leviticus 5); the offering of the first fruits and the giving of the tithe to the poor in the third year were accompanied by oral declarations (Deut. 26); but these exceptions do not disprove the rule. **Aside from the squeal of the victim and crackle of the fire the act of sacrifice was silent; neither the priest nor the worshipper said anything.** Of course, in times of need people prayed, and what better place for prayer than the central shrine, but these prayers, whether private or public, were occasioned by special circumstances and were not fixed parts of the temple ritual (that is, they were not 'statutory'). By late second temple times individuals would pray regularly at the temple, coordinating their prayers with the times of the sacrifices, but these were private petitions, not integral parts of the public cult." (Cohen 1999:302) [emphasis mine]

“... are harmonious. It should be further added that this sacrificial system will be a temporary one in that the millennium (with its partial population of unglorified humanity) will last only one thousand years. During the eternal state all inhabitants of the New Jerusalem will be glorified and will therefore not be a source of contagious impurities to defile the holiness of Yahweh.” (Hullinger 1995:289)

All of this raises the dichotomy: why is it that Hebrews 10:4-11 indicates that animal sacrifices cannot provide atonement for sins; yet Leviticus 4:20-35 and Ezekiel 45:15, 17, 20 indicate that they can?

Had not God provided a means for us to be reconciled to Him with the washing away of our sins upon calling upon Him asking for forgiveness in the Old Testament (II Sam 12:13; II Chron 6:21; Ps 86:5-6)? Yet one continues to bear the penalty for one's sins (Num 35:33; Deut 24:15; II Kings 14:6; Ps 49:7; Jer 31:30; Ezek 18:20) learning some hard lessons of the consequences for sins.²

This is a mystery to most.

My own, basic solution has been to explain that it is rather obvious from the Old Testament that God did forgive sins at that time. And he did accept a truly humble and sincere person's sacrifice as His means to atone or forgive. However, this did not mean that one is forgiven for eternity - for eternal life. It seems that the forgiveness was for that time – temporal, for a physical people.

In this Bible study we will explore the spiritual significance of sacrifices and whether they provided for a means for atoning for sins.

Spiritual intent of Sacrifices

Every Christian understands that sin creates a barrier between God and man. One fact that is often overlooked is how serious and solemn an offering or blood sacrifice was made. The entire ritual was undertaken with great reverence and deep meaning to the offeror:

“This joyous character belongs to such sacrifices as peace offerings and thank offerings, but does not belong to the `olah and others. In most cases the joyous feast followed the killing of the animal by which the expiation was accomplished, and the feast was joyous because atonement had been made. In fact, **many sacrifices were of the most solemn character and represented the deepest and most serious emotions of the heart**” (Bromily, “Sacrifice in the Old Testament,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1995).

“Sacrifice, to the pious Hebrew, was not something unimportant, or simply a perfunctory ritual, but it was an important element in his moral obedience to the revealed will of God. **Sacrifice was by its very nature intensely personal, ethical,**

² “... in the thought of the Old Testament the cleansing of the sin was of more importance than the escaping of its consequences.” (Rowley 1950, p. 101) Sicknesses, disease, broken relationships etc may not be healed upon repentance. The final healing is at the resurrection.

³ “The important point to be kept in mind is that uncleanness was treated as a contagion that had to be washed away lest it cause defilement. Quite often things such as animals (Lev. 11), childbirth (Lev. 12), swellings and eruptions (Lev. 13-14), sexual misdeeds (Lev. 18), and corpses (Lev. 21) could cause one to be unclean. Because many of the causes of uncleanness are not associated with ethics, **every person at one time or another in his life would be in a state of uncleanness** ... The impurities that were communicable and thus endangered the community were not always due to sin, but simply to the human condition, and they therefore required a blood sacrifice ... Since being unclean would eventually lead to death or God's judgment, there had to be a way for the unclean to become clean. This method included cleansing with water, quarantine, or atonement with sacrificial blood.” (Hullinger 1995, pp. 285, 286, 287) [emphasis mine]

moral, and spiritual, because it was intended to reflect the attitude of the heart and will toward God." (Freeman, "The Problem of the Efficacy of Old Testament Sacrifices," *Bulletin of the Theological Society*, Summer, 1982:73-4) [emphasis mine]

Sacrifices were offered each Sabbath, new moon, on the holy days and in various consecrations, dedications and completion of oaths. There must have been hundreds of thousands of these offerings during the days of ancient Israel.

Coming before God is not meant to be flippant. We come before Him in our lifestyles and thoughts each day. We also come before Him in prayer and supplication each day; and we come before Him on the sabbaths and holy days which are meant to be both serious and joyous. Sometimes we prayerfully appear before Him in fear.

So it was in the time of Israel – the sacrificial rite was a profound experience with deep meaning for the offeror. For the offeror appeared before God to beg forgiveness and to offer up that which He required for one to be forgiven. Personal accountability for sins and behaviours was accepted and the sacrificial ritual was intense as they came before Him with deep reverence, if not fear. Followed by joy that one is forgiven and acceptable to God.⁴

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him." (Prov 15:8)

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent." (Prov 21:27)

Similarly with Sabbath and Feast day observances – all of these observances and 'sacrifices' we offer spiritually, are serious events. Several key Scriptures refer to this:

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:21-24)

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-87)
(cf Ps 69:31-32; Jer 7:1-34; Dan 4:37; Hos 14:1-2; Jonah 3:10)

⁴ The sacrificial "atonement declared by then priest depended on the mercy of God, not on the intrinsic value of the sacrifice itself... [and then] go away with the words of forgiveness from the priest ringing in his ears, was learning something about the grace of God and the ethical power of repentance." (Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 291)

Note also Roy Gane's insights: "It is true that in English translations of the Bible the term "sacrifice" is used with reference to a particular class of sacrifice, including the well-being offering, in which an animal was slaughtered and the offerer ate some of the meat (for example Lev 3:1, 3, 6, 9; 7:11, 15, 16). But we can also apply the word "sacrifice," in the broader sense of an offering to God, to other kinds of sacrifices, such as burnt offerings and sin offerings. It was a sacrifice if it was given over to God in a special way" (*Altar Call*, p. 82).

If they are not observed in the correct manner and spirit, they become our days in a sense and not His. A good summary for understanding this concept is found at <https://www.ucg.org/beyond-today/feast-days-god-despises> (a secondary, prophetic meaning is that the people of God were observing false, heathen days in lieu of His festivals).

Discussing Amos 5:21 and Is 1:13-15, the article explains that

“God had given His people beautiful, meaningful feasts. Obviously it was not His own feasts that He despised, but the way the people were keeping them. In one blatant example of human disregard for God’s feasts, Jeroboam, king of Israel, had actually changed the dates of God’s Holy Days ...

Why then would He speak so strongly against Israel for the feasts they observed?

They were appearing before God as hypocrites. The people were trying to appear obedient to God by outwardly keeping the biblical Holy Days, or the altered days set by Jeroboam, while they secretly had other gods before Him. God would have nothing to do with such hypocritical attempts at deception ...

Isaiah 58 reveals some of the major problems. God’s people felt quite smug in a self-congratulatory manner—thinking whatever they did was pleasing to God. They fasted, but then did whatever they pleased. **They did not concern themselves with the oppressed and downtrodden. They were gossips and accusers of others.** Malachi 1:13 compasses God’s concern by telling Israel to stop breaking the Sabbath and dishonoring it by going their own way and by not using it as a day of joy and delight.

When God stated He despised their feast days (Amos 5:21), He was referring to the abominable conduct and attitude He was seeing. The attitudes reflected anything but the love and concern for one another God commanded, and the honor He deserved. **He was referring to those who developed whole systems of behavior that were in violation of the spiritual intent of the Holy Days of God.**

In Malachi, God speaks out against the priests who have not set their heart to honor Him (Malachi 2:2). In the book of Proverbs we read about seven things that God hates. All seven could be found within the attitudes about the Holy Days of God. Proverbs 6:16-20 lists pride, lying, hurting the innocent, having a wicked heart, running to evil, being a false witness and sowing discord among brethren.”⁵ [emphasis mine]

Thus, our attitude counts – do we observe the Sabbath and Holy Days in a sacrificial manner and attitude – outgoing concern for others or selfishness? Do we attend with the GET approach or the GIVE approach?

For example do we go to services to debate over basic doctrines and truths with an attitude to spread false ideas? Or do we go there to bolster the truth? Do we attend to forge selfish relationships or to lookout for the needs of others?

So, our ‘righteous acts’ are as filthy rags if not done with a pure heart and in the right spirit (Is 64:6. Cp Prov 15:8; 28:9; Is 65:3-5).

Albert Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible online adds to our understanding:

⁵ Paul Copan in *Is God a Moral Monster?* concurs with this line of thought: “This holiness wasn’t religious pretense—a phoniness that looked intact and decent on the outside but was cracked and rotting within. When God prescribed rituals, he wanted them to represent humility of heart and love for God and neighbor (Ps. 51:15–19). God hated rites like “festivals ... solemn assemblies ... burnt offerings and ... grain offerings” when God’s people ignored “justice” and “righteousness” (Amos 5:21–24). **Eating kosher foods and paying careful attention to rituals didn’t matter if the worship of God and the treatment of others weren’t kosher.**” (Copan 2011, p. 74) [emphasis mine]

“And all our righteousnesses - The plural form is used to denote the deeds which they had performed - meaning that pollution extended to every individual thing of the numerous acts which they had done. The sense is, that all their prayers, sacrifices, alms, praises, were mingled with pollution, and were worthy only of deep detestation and abhorrence.”

Indeed – one can try and keep the Commandments and other Christian requirements for life and not do it from a pure heart, and being nasty to others, it means nothing to God. In effect it becomes our own righteousness. It is a “form of godliness” or outward appearance (II Tim 3:1-5).

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:17)

The Meaning of Jeremiah 7:22-23

Following on from the above, this is one Scripture that some think that God does not wish to have sacrifices for ancient Israel.

“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.”

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh.

For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'

But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.

From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day.

Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.” (Jer 7:20-26)

This Scripture seems to contradict a range of others.

Think of the logic: there were sacrifices prior to the flood – Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-5)⁶; post flood - Noah (Gen 8:20); Abraham (Gen 12:7-8; 13:4,18; 15:9-11); Isaac (Gen 26:25); Jacob (Gen 28:18; 31:54;

⁶ Of interest are the observations by Richard Davidson: “In Genesis 4, just a few verses after the first sacrifice recorded in Gen 3:21, we have evidence that Cain and Abel were thoroughly instructed regarding the sacrificial system. Both Cain and Abel “brought” offerings to the Lord, but the narrative contrasts the two kinds of “gifts/offerings” (Heb. minchah) that were brought. Cain brought a bloodless offering from the fruit of the ground, while Abel brought an animal sacrifice (Gen 4:3-4). Although in the later Levitical system both first-fruit offerings and animal sacrifices were included (the minchah is actually the term used for the “grain offering”; Lev 2), the foundational offering was the bloody sacrifice. As Heb 9:22 summarizes, “without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin.” The first fruits thank offerings were to be brought *in addition to* the foundational animal sacrifices.

Genesis 4:3-4 appears to highlight the fact that Cain only brought the first fruit offering, but did not see the need to offer in addition an animal sacrifice showing his dependence upon the blood of the substitute, as God had made clear in Eden to Adam and Eve. Abel, on the other hand, brought both. This nuance of the Hebrew original is captured in the NASB translation: “So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, *on his part also brought* of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering” (emphasis supplied).

33:20; 35:7; 46:1); at the time of Job (Job 1:5; 42:7-9); Israel in ancient Egypt (Ex 12:1-12); and will be during the Millennium (Ezek 46-47) (Paul himself offered a sacrifice to purify himself according to Acts 21:23-26).

So why wouldn't there be a sacrificial system in ancient Israel? Or why will there be sacrifices in the millennium if God didn't want them?

Given the above, there appears – on the surface – to be a discrepancy between these scriptures and Jeremiah 7.

“When Jeremiah, for example, suggested that burnt-offerings were a waste of good food, it was the worshippers he was attacking; for he looked forward to abundant offerings of every kind in ideal times.” (Kidner 1958:11)

How can this be resolved?

Barnes *Notes on the Whole Bible* explains

“The meaning is, Increase your sacrifices as you will. Add burnt-offering to peace-offerings. All is in vain as long as you neglect the indispensable requirements of obedience and moral purity. Eat flesh is equivalent to sacrifice. The flesh of animals offered in sacrifice was usually eaten by the offerers, and this meal was regarded as a symbol of reconciliation. God and man partook of the same victim, and so were made friends. This passage Jeremiah 7:21-28 is the Haphtarah (lesson) from the prophets, after the Parashah, Leviticus 6-8, or Lesson from the Law. The selection of such a Haphtarah **shows that the Jews thoroughly understood that their sacrifices were not the end of the Law, but a means for spiritual instruction.**” [emphasis mine]

The *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* further explains that Jeremiah is

“Not contradicting the divine obligation of the legal sacrifices. But, “I did not require sacrifices, unless combined with moral obedience” (Ps 50:8; 51:16, 17). The superior claim of the moral above the positive precepts of the law was marked by the ten commandments having been delivered first, and by the two tables of stone being deposited alone in the ark (De 5:6). **The negative in Hebrew often supplies the want of the comparative: not excluding the thing denied, but only implying the prior claim of the thing set in opposition to it** (Ho 6:6). “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” (1Sa 15:22). Love to God is the supreme end, external observances only means towards that end. “The mere sacrifice was not so much what I commanded, as the sincere submission to My will gives to the sacrifice all its virtue” (Magee, Atonement, Note 57).” [emphasis mine]

Christopher Wright also explains

“Probably we should take the form of this sentence as an example of what is sometimes called Hebrew ‘relative negation’. In order to indicate the relative

Genesis 4:3-4 does not indicate the location to which Cain and Abel brought their offerings, but this is probably implied in v. 7. Recent studies of this verse⁴² provide evidence from the original Hebrew that the word khatta't (which can either mean “sin” or “sin-offering”) should better be translated as “sin-offering” and not “sin” in this verse, and the word petakh (“door/ opening”) here refers to the cherubim-guarded door/gate of Paradise, where sinful humans were to bring their sacrifices, paralleling the numerous uses of petakh in the Torah describing the door of the tabernacle (Exod 29:4, 11, 32, 42; 33:9-10; etc.). In this verse, God is encouraging Cain to offer up an animal sacrifice for his sin at the eastern “door” of the Garden where the post-Fall sanctuary was located.” (Davidson 2015, pp. 78-79)

priority of one thing over another, you would affirm one and deny the other: e.g., 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (Hos. 6:6; the second line indicates the comparison). (Hos 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings)." (*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit* 2001:291, footnote 22) [emphasis mine]⁷

Discussion

One holy day that stands out in all of this is the Day of Atonement which performed a very special function.

Unlike other blood sacrifices, the ritual intent of this Day was to cover the sins of the nation of Israel annually.⁸

But what of the sins committed from that Day forward, until the following year's Day of Atonement? How were they purged given that they affected the Israelite's relationship with God? It was even dangerous to approach Him in a sinful state. He hates sin and does not want to have anything to do with it, even in the slightest.

So, to be cleansed or purged, a variety of different sacrifices were performed to enable cleansing and covering, thus removing His wrath from them, enabling their freedom from the penalty of law breaking.

Thus, blood sacrifices were part and parcel of one's relationship with God and took on several motivations:

- Forgiveness of various types of sins
- For ceremonial cleanness after child birth or a skin disease
- Making a vow in God's presence

⁷ Here is further evidence for this logic: "The most controversy centers around this verse because it appears to invalidate the whole sacrificial system. Certain critics have understood it to mean that the law of sacrifices was not given by Moses but was introduced centuries later - a position that is part of the elaborate system that denies the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In order to treat the question adequately, one must understand the sense of the Hebrew text. In it a **rhetorical negation** is used to point up anthesis of v.22 and v.23 more emphatically (cf. Deut 5:3). **Moreover, the negation in Hebrew often supplies the lack of a comparative - i.e., without excluding the thing denied**, the statement implies only the importance of the thing set in contrast to it (Hos 6:6). In short, the Hebrew idiom permits denial of one thing in order to emphasize another (cf. for a NT parallel Luke 14:26). The idiom does not intend to deny the statement but only to set it in a secondary place (so Frost).

"That the OT sacrifices were non-Mosaic cannot be valid ... Here Isaiah 1:11-15; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-25, and Micah 6:6-8 should be carefully considered. Judah had left out the main element: obedience to God. In view of the passages just cited, and in view of the Pentateuchal legislation, sacrifices were always meant to be of secondary importance to obedience and godliness. **Neither Jeremiah nor any other prophet decried sacrifices as such. They meant that moral law is always paramount to the ritual law**" (Feinberg 1986, p. 431).

⁸ "The promise that follows is that the sacrifice "will be accepted on [that person's] behalf to make atonement for [that one]" (1:4c). *Atonement* is a key word in Leviticus, for it appears here almost fifty times (along with almost another fifty times in the rest of the OT), usually in association with the priest making atonement by means of a sacrifice. The word does not mean "to cover," even though a verb in a different Hebrew stem (the Qal) using the same consonants appear in gen 6:14 meaning "to smear with pitch," to caulk or in that sense, "to cover."

Nu 35:31 "Do not accept a ransom [*kpr* - root; *koper* - with vowels] for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death. (NIV).

"Rather than resorting to this single usage of the verb, Hebrew grammar is better served by deriving this verb from the noun of the same consonants meaning "a ransom" (see Num 35:31; Isa 43:3). Since the verb "to atone" is used only in the intensive stem (the Hebrew piel), it is better to understand it as a denominative verb meaning "to give ransom" or "to deliver or atone by a substitute." Even the lid to the ark of the covenant, called the "mercy seat" in the KJV, it literally "a place of atonement" "(Kaiser 1994, p. 1012)

- For commitment and worship

Then they could be regarded as washed clean and able to approach God with a clear conscience (ICor 1:27; 13:5-10; Eph 3:12; Phil 2:12; Heb 4:16; 10:22). This means of honouring Him allayed His wrath and assisted in their relationship with Him.

With the above in mind, we are ready to examine and understand a number of Scriptures which, on the surface, seem to indicate that sacrifices are superficial for one's relationship with God; or that they are 'done away.'

As we shall see, neither view is correct.

First of all, a number of scriptures inform us that during the Millennium, the temple, priesthood and blood sacrifices will be restored: Ezek 37:26; 46-47 [NB: 45:17]; Is 56:7; 60:7; Zeph 3:10; Zech 14:21; Mal 3:3-4).

The **Appendix Pertinent Scriptures** lists those verses that are used to argue for this view: none of these scriptures can be used to argue that sacrifices are 'done away.' Rather, they are informing the reader or listener that sacrificing must be accompanied with the right attitude and approach. For spiritual sacrifices and attitudes are more important than the physical, nevertheless the physical is not abolished.

Therefore, as some of those scriptures demonstrate, God would prefer a right attitude to sacrifices. But they do not indicate that sacrifices are abolished prior to the installation of His eternal kingdom.

So we should ask the question "how did the sacrifices provide for forgiveness and atonement?"

Do the Scriptures contradict?

Notice that the letter to the Hebrews actually tells us that, confirming the efficacy of the sacrifices"

"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)

And Lev 17:11 tells us categorically:

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is **the blood that makes atonement** by the life."

And also, Lev 4:33, 35:

"... and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering ...
And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD's food offerings. And the priest **shall make atonement** for him for the sin which he has committed, **and he shall be forgiven.**"

So, Hebrews agrees with Leviticus – that God accepts sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins.

On the other hand let us look at Hebrews

“But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Heb 10:3-4)

“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how **much more** will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God ...

“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” (Heb 9:13-14, 22-24)

Is there a contradiction between these scriptures, or is it us who do not understand the teaching of sacrifices, their meaning and typology which are still relevant for us today?

One Jewish commentator, W Gunther Plaut, laments

“What do moderns consider “primitive” about such rituals? Doubtless, pre-biblical origins of sacrifice go back to beliefs that the gods desired food for their consumption. But the Torah itself no longer gives any warrant for the continuation of such beliefs, and Psalm 50 expressly disavows them. Most likely it is the public nature of the ancient slaughtering process that is repellent to current tastes. We prefer to hide the procedure behind the walls of abattoirs where the animals are killed in a fashion no less bloody, but without making it necessary for the consumer to witness the life and death cycle, which goes into his pleasurable nourishment. Moreover, even when we share with others in the eating process, we do not generally experience any of the genuinely worthy emotions, which were usually engendered by the sacrifices of old. In the root meaning of the English word, we do not “sacrifice” (that is, we do not render holy) anything when we eat.

This does not mean that our age ought to be ready for any reconsideration of cultic sacrifice. **It does suggest that when seen in its own context the biblical order of animal offerings was a genuine form of worship that cannot be quickly dismissed with prejudicial contemporary judgments.**” (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary* 1981: 1218) [emphasis mine]

This is a good explanation for why many Christians recoil at the thought of sacrifices and from there reject any notion of the restoration of the sacrificial system under the Messiah. They also fail to study and thus grasp their deep meaning and the intense importance of the practice for the ancient Israelites. For God does not think like us and it is rather up to us to align with Him, not for us to water-down or reject major portions of His Word to align with a soft interpretation of the scriptures or even political correctness (Is 55:8-9).⁹

Freeman in “The Problem of the Efficacy of Old Testament Sacrifices,” *Bulletin of the Theological Society* concurs, while providing additional insights

⁹Kidner quotes Prof H Rowley who “has well pointed out (*The Meaning of Sacrifice in the Old Testament* [1950], p. 100) that David’s sins of adultery and murder, the subject of this fifty-first Psalm, were not eligible for sacrificial atonement; and that it would be ‘gratuitous to assume that the psalmist meant to imply that sacrifice was equally useless under quite other circumstances.’” (Kidner 1958, p. 26)

“To the superficial observer this [Psalm 50:16-19] appear as a rejection of sacrifice as a result of the later higher moral concept of religion by the Hebrews. **But verse 19 which follows repudiates this view**; for after the heart of the worshipper is returned in penitence toward God,
Then will they offer bullocks upon thine altar. (Ps. 51:19 RSV)” (Freeman 1962:22) [emphasis mine]

Psalm 51 shows us that the Christian heart is better than the gifts we bring before God. Are we pure and sincere or just following through with the letter of the law or also the spiritual intent?¹⁰

For further readings on this, refer to the **Appendix. What about the Sacrifices?** and **Appendix. Extracts from Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel.**

Reasonings by Experts

Below I provide a number of quotes from experts who have delved deeply into the issue of the supposed conflict between Old and New Testament statements on the effectiveness or capacity of a sacrifice to be accepted by God as a means to forgiveness of sins.

Freeman asserts

“No valid distinction can be made between the Levitical (or ceremonial) and prophetic (or moral) elements of the Old Testament, since each was divinely instituted to serve its proper purpose. Such a separation is unbiblical and foreign to Old Testament thought. Throughout Israel's history the moral was taught *through* the ceremonial, the ceremonial being the necessary vehicle for the expression of the moral ...

“**sacrifice was then the only sufficient means of remaining in harmonious relation to God. It was adequate for the period in which God intended it should serve.** This is not the same as saying Levitical sacrifice was on an equal with the sacrifice of Christ, nor that the blood of bulls and goats could, from God's side, take away sins ...” (Freeman 1962:73) [emphasis mine]

Freeman’s article is short, crisp and clear: the sacrifices were a means God provided for atonement and forgiveness of sins. But this was temporal as he goes on to explain clearly throughout the article.

Walter Kaiser agrees

“**The only solution is to take the OT and NT statements seriously.** We conclude then, with Hobart Freeman, that the OT sacrifices were *subjectively efficacious*, in **that the sinner did receive full relief** ... But it is also clear that the sacrifices of bulls and goats were *not in themselves* expiatory and efficacious. The most these sacrifices could do was to point to the need for a perfect, living substitute who would, in the timing of God, ransom and deliver all from the debt, guilt, and effects of their sin. Thus, the OT sacrifices were not *objectively* efficacious; but then neither did the OT ever claim that the blood of these bulls and goats was inherently effective...

“The efficacy of the OT sacrifices, then rested in the Word of God, who boldly announced that sacrifices done in this manner and with this heart attitude (Ps 50:8, 14; 51:16 [Heb 10:8]; Prov 15:8, 21:3; Isa 1:11-18; 66:3; Jer 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Amos

¹⁰ “Strikingly, whenever the psalmists or prophets referred to moral purification, they never used the term [Heb for purifying of cleansing— Instead they used terms that signify cleansing with water (Ps 51 2, Isa 1 16, Ezek 36 25, Zech 13 1).” (Hullinger 1995, p. 284)

5:21; Mic 6:6-8) would receive from God a genuine experience of full forgiveness. Of course, everything depended on the perfect payment for this release, payment that would occur sometime in the future. Therefore, not the blood of bulls and goats but the "blood" (i.e., the life rendered up in violent death) of a perfect sacrifice finally made possible all the forgiveness proleptically enjoyed in the OT and retrospectively appreciated in the NT. Only the lamb of God could have provided *objective efficacy*, even though the subjective efficacy that had preceded it was grounded on the authority and promised work of Christ.

"Until the death of Christ happened, the sins of the OT saints were both forgiven and "passed over" (*paresis*, Rom 3:25) in the merciful grace of God until the expiatory death of Christ provided what no animal ever could do and what no OT text ever claimed it could do.

"During the OT period, sins were forgiven and remembered against men and women no more (Ps 103:3, 10-12) - in fact, removed as far from the OT confessor as the east is from the west! Thus, the OT saint experienced sins forgiven on the basis of God's Word and sins forgotten (i.e., "remembered against him no more," (Ezek 18:22, my translation) on the same basis" (Walter Kaiser, *Towards Rediscovering The Old Testament* 1991: 133-35).

Kidner, author of *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, adds to this understanding

"... the devotion the burnt offering was meant to express: a Godward devotion to the uttermost.

Secondly, the ritual expressed the worshipper's intimate association with the victim. He is more than a donor: he is regarded as himself involved or represented in what happens to the offering ...

"In every sacrifice, whatever its character, there must be the ritual of the blood; for though atonement was not the be-all and end-all of every offering, relations with God could not exist without it. So the priest, treading now where the offerer cannot, takes the shed blood and casts it against the altar' ...

The whole of this procedure, elaborate though it is, **makes its meaning plain enough, impressing on the thoughtful worshipper the desire of God for 'truth in the inward parts', and for a disciplined devotion.**" (Kidner 1958:11, 12)¹¹ [emphasis mine]

Hullinger goes further, explaining that the Hebrew word for atonement "to cover over" sin (ie forgive) demonstrates that sin was covered by blood sacrifice, so that God would not punish the Israelite sacrificial offeror for his sins. But coming before Him with a pure heart was paramount to enable forgiveness.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen evidence from the Scriptures and specialists on the subject, that sacrifices are very important to God, whether they be physical or spiritual, though what is spiritual is always paramount.

The part they played in Old Testament worship formed a critical component of one's spiritual connection with God. And they will be revived during the Millennial reign of the Messiah.

¹¹"The offerings which we have already considered were brought not by command but by invitation, as the worshipper felt moved. This implied that relations between him and God were relatively happy - though indeed far from perfect, as the shed blood and the impassable threshold testified. But the Sin- and Guilt- Offerings were prescribed for breaches of that fellowship, and the element of atonement, which we have noticed in the other sacrifices, here dominates the picture." (Kidner 1958, p. 19)

Of special interest is that sacrifices, as with all of the 613 laws were never ‘done away with.’ They continue on spiritually in the Christian life and will again be in the Millennial temple.

From what can be gauged from a casual reading of the Scriptural references to forgiveness due to God’s acceptance of offerings with a pure heart, that was a temporal forgiveness for a physical people. For one who is spiritual (whether dwelling in Old or New Testament times), forgiveness is ‘unto eternal life.’

As such, it seems that sins were not ‘taken away’ in the sense of permanent removal by animal sacrifices. The word for *atonement* is *kaphar* which has the sense of covering rather than eternal removal (*kaphar* is the word used for covered in reference to the pitch covering Noah’s ark – Gen 6:14).

In that sense sins were covered or forgiven for one’s temporary life and therefore the sacrifices offered temporary forgiveness. Only the blood of Christ can fully remove sins for eternity.

Freeman, again, is spot on when explaining the atonement effect of sacrifices:

“This is not the same as saying, however, as the writer of Hebrews observes, that the frequent animal sacrifices effected a permanent peace and satisfaction for the conscience “Else would they not cease to be offered?” (Heb 10:2) ... **they did not possess that dynamic operation as the once for all efficacious sacrifice of Christ.**” [emphasis mine] (1962:75)

“It is categorically true that the blood of bulls and goats could never *take away* sin; but then the Old Testament *never says that it did*. **What God promised to Israel was the forgiveness of sins and restoration to covenant standing** to be accomplished through the death and shedding of the blood of an innocent substitute victim.” (Freeman 1962:78) [emphasis mine]

For, it can only be the sacrifice of the Son of God who can take wipe away all sin from everyone for all eternity, thereby eternal salvation for all those that answer the call and endure until the end.

Further, by offering sacrifices, we cannot earn salvation:

“**Participation by offerers did not mean that they earned their own salvation, which was beyond their capability and was God’s gift to them through the sanctuary system that He had set up.** Rather, the offerer’s part was to accept and cooperate with the gift, expressing faith in the divinely appointed ransom that pointed beyond a token animal to a much greater Sacrifice.” (Roy Gane, “Legal Substitution and Experiential Transformation in the Typology of Leviticus, Part 2”, Ministry, Jan 2014, p. 11)¹² [emphasis mine]

May I suggest that we study and explore the sacrificial system so that we understand the depth, validity and meaning of this system and its relevancy for Christians. Until we acknowledge its

¹² Gane further explains: “The setting of the book of Leviticus lies within the Israelites’ epic journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land that the Lord had promised them (Lev. 1:1; 7:38; 26:46; 27:34). God provided this journey in order to transform their experience, especially in relation to Himself as their covenant Lord.” (p. 10)

“So the system of expiatory sacrifices and associated penalties required the active involvement of sinners to acknowledge their faults and put things right in order to heal the relationships that they had hurt.” (p. 11)

“In Leviticus, the animal sacrifices serve as token substitutes to ransom the lives of Israelites from blame leading to punishment. Aaronic priests also bore such blame as substitutes for their people, but they did not actually suffer the consequences. The book of Hebrews, however, identifies Christ as the Priest who bore human sins and actually suffered the consequences of those sins as the Victim of adequate value.” (p. 12)

importance, typology and future restoration, we will fail to grasp a very important aspect of God's plan and thereby miss out on a vital component of Biblical understanding.

Suggested Readings on the Significance of the Sacrificial System

Ashby, W. B. (2008). Galan, B.	<i>Rose Guide to the Tabernacle</i> (chart "Sacrifices in the Tabernacle," p. 33). Rose Publishing, Torrance, CA.
Habershon, A. (1974 edition).	<i>Study of the Types</i> . Kregel Classics, Grand Rapids, MI.
Jensen, P. P. (1992).	<i>Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World</i> . Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, UK.
Link, N. (2008).	<i>The Sacrificial System and the Tabernacle in the Wilderness</i> . Global Church of God (UK) in collaboration with the Church of the Eternal God (USA) and Church of God, A Christian Fellowship (Canada).
Price, R. (2012).	<i>Rose Guide to the Temple</i> (chart demonstrating sacrifices and their significance, p. 43). Rose Publishing, Torrance, CA.
Ryken, L. (ed, et al). (1998).	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery</i> . InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.
Slemming, C. W. (1955).	<i>Those Are the Garments</i> . Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London, UK.
Slemming, C. W. (1955).	<i>Thus Shalt Thou Serve</i> . Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, Penn.
Soltau, H. W. (1971 edition).	<i>The Holy Vessels and Furniture of the Tabernacle</i> . Kregel, Grand Rapids, MI.
Whitcomb, J. C. (1985).	"Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel," <i>Grace Theological Journal</i> , Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 201-217.

Appendix Pertinent Scriptures

1 Samuel 15:22-23

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.

Psalms 40:6-8

In sacrifice and [meal] offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

Psalms 50:8-9

Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds.

Psalms 51:16-19

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem;

then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar. (cp Prov 15:8; II Sam 12:13)

Psalm 69:30-31

I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the LORD better than an ox *or* bullock that hath horns and hoofs.
The humble shall see *this, and* be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God.

Proverbs 21:3

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Ecclesiastes 5:1

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.

Isaiah 1:11-17

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

"When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?

Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Jeremiah 7:22-23

For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'

Hosea 6:6-7

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.

Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (cf Ps 69:31-32; Jer 7:1-34; Dan 4:37; Hos 14:1-2; Amos 5:22-24; Jonah 3:10)

Matthew 5:23-24

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 9:11-13

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Matthew 12:76-8

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.

Matthew 23:23

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

Mark 12:32-34

And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.

And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Hebrews 10:4-10

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 that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;

in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

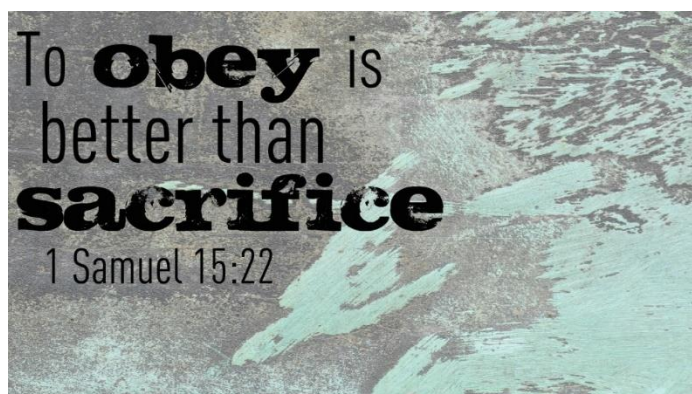
When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.



Appendix

Sacrifice in Ancient Israel

By William K. Gilders

One way to think about ancient sacrifices is as “gifts” given to God. When they performed sacrifices, ancient Israelites gave to God some of what they believed God had given them, expressing their close relationship with God and seeking to deepen that bond.

In the Hebrew Bible, sacrifice always involves *transformation*. One of the most common ways to *transform* something is to *destroy* it. Destruction removes the animal from the ordinary realm and transfers it to a transcendent one. Biblical texts tell us that God received the *smoke* of the burning sacrifice as a “pleasing odor” (see, for example, Lev 1:13). In so doing, God enjoyed a fellowship meal with human beings in God’s dwelling on earth—the temple.

The temple was a domestic setting, the place of God’s presence with the nation. One of the most common terms for the temple was “house,” and it had furnishings, such as a lamp and a table. The altar was a cooking surface, a barbecue, so to speak, where the sacrificial animal was “cooked.” Burning up or “over-cooking” the sacrifices in the altar fire marked out the specialness of the food offerings.

Instructions for the performance of various types of sacrifices are found in the first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus. There are five main types of grain and animal sacrifice:

- Burnt offering (Hebrew, *olah*; literally, “ascending offering”; Lev 1, Lev 6:8-13) could be a herd or flock animal (bull, sheep, or goat) or a bird (dove or pigeon). The whole animal was burned in the altar fire. It was the most extravagant sacrifice because the entirety was given to God.
- Grain offering (Hebrew, *minhah*; literally, “gift”; Lev 2, Lev 6:14-23) was an offering of fine flour or unleavened baked goods, mixed with oil. A handful of the offering was burned (with incense) in the altar fire. The rest went to the priests.

- Sacrifice of well-being/fellowship offering (Hebrew, *zevah shelamim*; Lev 3, Lev 7:11-35) could be a herd or flock animal. Innards (fat, kidneys, and part of the liver) were burned in the altar fire. Most of the animal was eaten, divided between the priests and the offerer. This sacrifice was associated with feasting and well-being.
- Sin/purification offering (Hebrew, *hatta't*; Lev 4:1-5:13, Lev 6:24-30) dealt with disruption in the relationship between human beings and God. The offering depended on the identity and status of the person required to make it. The chief priest, for example, had to bring a bull, whereas ordinary Israelites brought a female goat or lamb. Those who were too poor to afford a goat or sheep could offer birds, and an offering of grain flour was acceptable from the very poor.
- Guilt offering (Hebrew, *'asham*; literally, "responsibility"; Lev 5:14-6:7, Lev 7:1-10) dealt with distinct categories of wrongdoing that disrupted the divine-human relationship, such as unintentional desecration of sacred things. The prescribed sacrifice was a flock animal. As with the sacrifice of well-being and the sin offering, innards were burned in the altar fire; the animal's flesh was eaten by the priests.

These five varied sacrificial offerings have one element in common: the burning of some portion in the altar fire to transform the offering into smoke or a "pleasing odor" that God could enjoy.

Sacrifice is not a do-it-yourself activity in Leviticus. Rather, priests are required to bring about the transfer and transformation of the offering. Not only are they expert in the proper procedures, but they also bear the risk of moving into God's presence.

Every animal sacrifice includes special treatment of the animal's blood, which various biblical passages identify with the life force of the animal (see, for example, Gen 9:4¹³, Deut 12:23). Despite the clear importance of this ritual use of blood, only one verse in the entire Hebrew Bible appears to explain its significance (Lev 17:11). This debated but crucial verse concerns life, not death; animal life on the altar preserves and enhances human life.

William K. Gilders, "Sacrifice in Ancient Israel" (cited 5 Mar 2019). Online

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/passages/related-articles/sacrifice-in-ancient-israel>

Appendix

"Sacrifice," *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

[Dictionaries - Smith's Bible Dictionary - Sacrifice](#)

Sacrifice.

The peculiar features of each kind of sacrifice are referred to under their respective heads. I.

(A) ORIGIN OF SACRIFICE. --The universal prevalence of sacrifice shows it to have been primeval, and deeply rooted in the instincts of humanity. Whether it was first enjoined by an external command, or whether it was based on that sense of sin and lost communion with God which is stamped by his hand on the heart of man, is a historical question which cannot be determined.

(B) ANTE-MOSAIC HISTORY OF SACRIFICE. --In examining the various sacrifices recorded in Scripture before the establishment of the law, we find that the words specially denoting expiatory sacrifice are not applied to them. This fact does not at all show that they were not actually expiatory, but it justified the inference that this idea was not then the prominent one in the doctrine of sacrifice. The sacrifices of Cain and Abel are called *minehah*, tend appear to have been eucharistic. Noahs, (Genesis 8:20)

¹³ "From First Samuel 14:31-35 it may be deduced that "eating with the blood" means eating meat without first pouring out the blood before God". (Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Laws of Clean and Unclean and their Relationship with the Concept of Sacred Space", 1999, p. 4)

and Jacobs at Mizpah, were at the institution of a covenant; and may be called federative. In the burnt offerings of Job for his children (Job 1:5) and for his three friends ch. (Job 42:8) we for the first time find the expression of the desire of expiation for sin. The same is the case in the words of Moses to Pharaoh. (Exodus 10:26) Here the main idea is at least deprecatory.

(C) THE SACRIFICES OF THE MOSAIC PERIOD. --These are inaugurated by the offering of the Passover and the sacrifice of (Exodus 24:1) ... The Passover indeed is unique in its character but it is clear that the idea of salvation from death by means of sacrifice is brought out in it with a distinctness before unknown. The law of Leviticus now unfolds distinctly the various forms of sacrifice:

(a) The burnt offering : Self-dedicatory.

(b) The meat offering : (unbloody): Eucharistic.

(c) The sin offering ; the trespass offering: Expiatory. To these may be added,

(d) The incense offered after sacrifice in the holy place and (on the Day of Atonement) in the holy of holies, the symbol of the intercession of the priest (as a type of the great High Priest) accompanying and making efficacious the prayer of the people. In the consecration of Aaron and his sons, (Leviticus 8:1) ... we find these offered in what became ever afterward their appointed order. First came the sin offering, to prepare access to God; next the burnt offering, to mark their dedication to his service; and third the meat offering of thanksgiving. Henceforth the sacrificial system was fixed in all its parts until he should come whom it typified.

(D) POST-MOSAIC SACRIFICES. --It will not be necessary to pursue, in detail the history of the Post Mosaic sacrifice, for its main principles were now fixed forever. The regular sacrifices in the temple service were—

(a) Burnt offerings. 1, the daily burnt offerings, (Exodus 29:38-42) 2, the double burnt offerings on the Sabbath, (Numbers 28:9 Numbers 28:10) 3, the burnt offerings at the great festivals; (Numbers 26:11 ; Numbers 29:39)

(b) Meat offerings . 1, the daily meat offerings accompanying the daily burnt offerings, (Exodus 29:40 Exodus 29:41) 2, the shewbread, renewed every Sabbath, (Leviticus 24:6 Leviticus 24:9) 3, the special meat offerings at the Sabbath and the great festivals, (Numbers 28:1 ; Numbers 29:1) ... 4, the first-fruits, at the Passover, (Leviticus 23:10-14) at Pentecost, (Leviticus 23:17-20) the firstfruits of the dough and threshing-floor at the harvest time. (Numbers 15:20 Numbers 15:21 ; 26:1-11)

(c) Sin offerings . 1, sin offering each new moon (Numbers 28:15) 2, sin offerings at the passover, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets and Tabernacles, (Numbers 28:22 Numbers 28:30; Numbers 29:5 Numbers 29:16 Numbers 29:19 Numbers 29:22 Numbers 29:25 Numbers 29:28 Numbers 29:31 Numbers 29:34 Numbers 29:38) 3, the offering of the two goats for the people and of the bullock for the priest himself, on the Great Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16:1) ...

(d) Incense .

1, the morning and evening incense (Exodus 30:7 Exodus 30:8)

2, the incense on the Great Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16:12) Besides these public sacrifices, there were offerings of the people for themselves individually. II. By the order of sacrifice in its perfect form, as in (Leviticus 8:1) ... it is clear that the sin offering occupies the most important: place; the burnt offering comes next, and the meat offering or peace offering last of all. The second could only be offered after the first had been accepted; the third was only a subsidiary part of the second. Yet, in actual order of time it has been seen that the patriarchal sacrifices partook much more of the nature of the peace offering and burnt offering, and that under the law, by which was "the knowledge of sin," (Romans 3:20) the sin offering was for the first time explicitly set forth. This is but natural that the deepest ideas should be the last in order of development.

The essential difference between heathen views of sacrifice and the scriptural doctrine of the Old Testament is not to be found in its denial of any of these views. In fact, it brings out clearly and distinctly the ideas which in heathenism were uncertain, vague and perverted. But the essential points

of distinction are two. First, that whereas the heathen conceived of their gods as alienated in jealousy or anger, to be sought after and to be appeased by the unaided action of man, Scripture represents God himself as approaching man, as pointing out and sanctioning the way by which the broken covenant should be restored. The second mark of distinction is closely connected with this, inasmuch as it shows sacrifice to be a scheme proceeding from God, and in his foreknowledge, connected with the one central fact of all human history. From the prophets and the Epistle to the Hebrews we learn that the sin offering represented that covenant as broken by man, and as knit together again, by Gods appointment through the shedding of the blood, the symbol of life, signified that the death of the offender was deserved for sin, but that the death of the victim was accepted for his death by the ordinance of Gods mercy. Beyond all doubt the sin offering distinctly witnessed that sin existed in man. that the "wages of that sin was death," and that God had provided an atonement by the vicarious suffering of an appointed victim.

The ceremonial and meaning of the burnt offering were very different. The idea of expiation seems not to have been absent from it, for the blood was sprinkled round about the altar of sacrifice; but the main idea is the offering of the whole victim to God, representing as the laying of the hand on its head shows, the devotion of the sacrificer, body and soul. to him. (Romans 12:1) The death of the victim was, so to speak, an incidental feature. The meat offering, the peace or thank offering, the firstfruits, etc., were simply offerings to God of his own best gifts, as a sign of thankful homage, and as a means of maintaining his service and his servants. The characteristic ceremony in the peace offering was the eating of the flesh by the sacrificer. It betokened the enjoyment of communion with God. It is clear from this that the idea of sacrifice is a complex idea, involving the propitiatory, the dedicatory and the eucharistic elements. Any one of these, taken by itself, would lead to error and superstition. All three probably were more or less implied in each sacrifice. each element predominating in its turn.

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains the key of the whole sacrificial doctrine. The object of the epistle is to show the typical and probationary character of sacrifices, and to assert that in virtue of it alone they had a spiritual meaning. Our Lord is declared (see) (1 Peter 1:20) "to have been foreordained" as a sacrifice "before the foundation of the world," or as it is more strikingly expressed in (Revelation 13:8) "slain from the foundation of the world." The material sacrifices represented this great atonement as already made and accepted in Gods foreknowledge; and to those who grasped the ideas of sin, pardon and self-dedication symbolized in them, they were means of entering into the blessings which the one true sacrifice alone procured. They could convey nothing in themselves yet as types they might, if accepted by a true though necessarily imperfect faith be means of conveying in some degree the blessings of the antitype. It is clear that the atonement in the Epistle to the Hebrews as in the New Testament generally, is viewed in a twofold light. On the one hand it is set forth distinctly as a vicarious sacrifice, which was rendered necessary by the sin of man and in which the Lord "bare the sins of many." It is its essential characteristic that in it he stands absolutely alone offering his sacrifice without any reference to the faith or the conversion of men. In it he stands out alone as the mediator between God and man; and his sacrifice is offered once for all, never to be imitated or repeated. Now, this view of the atonement is set forth in the epistle as typified by the sin offering. On the other hand the sacrifice of Christ is set forth to us as the completion of that perfect obedience to the will of the Father which is the natural duty of sinless man.

The main idea of this view of the atonement is representative rather than vicarious. It is typified by the burnt offering. As without the sin offering of the cross this our burnt offering would be impossible, so also without the burnt offering the sin offering will to us be unavailing. With these views of our Lords sacrifice oil earth, as typified in the Levitical sacrifices on the outer altar, is also to be connected the offering of his intercession for us in heaven, which was represented by the incense. The typical sense of the meat offering or peace offering is less connected the sacrifice of Christ himself than with those sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, charity and devotion which we, as Christians, offer to God, and "with which he is well pleased," (Hebrews 13:15 Hebrews 13:16) as with an odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable to God." (Philemon 4:28)

Appendix

Extracts from *What about the Sacrifices?*

After writing this article, I received an e-mail recommending the booklet *What about the Sacrifices?* by D. Thomas Lancaster. We would not agree with everything in the book, but overall it is very useful indeed.

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Though we desire communion and fellowship with God, every natural inclination of our heart resists him. We are unable to come near to him. He is life; we are mortal. He is pure; we are polluted. He is infinite; we are finite. He is holy; we are common. He is transcendent; we are not. Man cannot, on his own, enter his Presence. (p. 5)

Unlike the other types of sacrifices that a worshipper might bring to the LORD, the *olah* did not profit the worshipper in any way. He retained no choice cuts of meat. He received no ritual purification from the *olah*, no expiation, nothing but complete giving over to God. The fire on the altar consumed the entire animal. The very word *olah* suggests this: “that which rises.” The altar fire translated the substance of the sacrifice into heat and smoke which “rise” to heaven as a sweet savor before the Lord. (p. 11)

... **the laying on of hands symbolizes a transfer of identity. Through the laying on of hands, the one leaning confers his identity onto the one being leaned upon.** The Levites are invested with the identity of all Israel. Joshua is invested with the identity of Moses. Judges, elders, rabbis, and deacons transfer their authority and office to new judges, elders, rabbis, and deacons through the laying on of hands. When a man leaned his hands on the head of an animal, he invested his identity into the animal. The animal then represented him before the Lord. In the case of sin offerings, a man confessed his sins while laying his hands on the animal. (p. 13)¹⁴

When the prophets seem to speak against the sacrificial system, they are not condemning the mode of worship; they are condemning the worshippers. In every instance the prophets direct their rebuke toward the immoral, disobedient people among the Israelites who violated the covenant of Torah while continuing to go through the motions of the sacrificial system. Though their hearts were far from God, they continued to perform their religious rituals. This can be compared to a wicked womanizer who beats his wife and cheats on her but continues to faithfully attend church every Sunday and take communion with the rest of the congregation. His religious ritual is meaningless and an insult to God. Or suppose the same fellow, after beating his wife and cheating on her, sends her a bouquet of roses to compensate. Would she be pleased to receive the flowers? Hardly. She would say, “Your flowers are an abomination to me!” In the same way, **God hates religious rituals when they are performed hypocritically.** These lessons should be a warning to all of us. We must be careful not to develop any sense of right-standing with God because of ritual observances. God is interested in the state of our hearts. Our outward rituals should reflect our inward conditions. (p. 19)

We all desire to “draw near” to God. Yet human sin and mortality cuts us off from communion and fellowship with him. We are unable to approach the holy God. Just as Moses was unable to enter the Tabernacle at the end of the book of Exodus, we too are unable to enter into God’s presence. He is holy; we are common. He is immortal; we are mortal. He is pure; we are impure. He is righteousness;

¹⁴ The upon of hands was not undertaken with a light pressing, but rather “laying one’s hand upon the animal ... means to press down on or lean on with heavy pressure” as if one were transferring one’s sins into the innocent creature (Morales 2015, p. 127).

we are sinful. We cannot come near to God without a *korban* (something brought near) in our stead. (p. 20)

...we find that the early Jewish believers were essentially a Temple sect, still participating in the Temple system after the death and resurrection of Yeshua. (p. 40)

The terms “mountain of the house of the LORD,” “mountain of the LORD,”)and “house of the God of Jacob,” all refer to the Temple. (p. 40)

The writer of the book of Hebrews declares that a second covenant was needed because the first covenant was flawed; “for if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second” (Hebrews 8:7). The word “covenant” does not actually appear in the Greek of Hebrews 8:7; instead, it is supplied by the English translator. The writer is contrasting the covenant made at Sinai with the new covenant. He refers to the covenant made at Sinai as the “first,” and the new covenant as the “second.” The problem with inserting the word “covenant” where it was not written is that the writer of Hebrews speaks sometimes in the broad terms of old and new covenant, but at other times he speaks in the narrower terms of tabernacle and priesthood. At still other times, he uses the terms “first” and “second” to contrast “this present world” and the “the world to come.” (p. 57)

So what then is it that is the aging, obsolete, and disappearing thing? It is the first, the *protos*—this present world. This becomes clear when the writer of the book of Hebrews explains that the *protos* “is a symbol for the present time” (Hebrews 9:9). What will soon disappear are our human failings. Soon to disappear is the need for one man to tell his neighbor, “Know the LORD.” This world, fallen and imperfect as we know it, will disappear, being swallowed up first, in part, during the Messianic Age, and then in the world to come, which will appear at the end of the Messianic Era. The *protos* will be completely subsumed in the *deuteros*. In the world to come, there will be no need for Temple, priesthood, or sacrifice; as it says, “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” (Revelation 21:22). (p. 59)

Let’s recapitulate what we have learned. The idea that the Tabernacle/Temple symbolized the old covenant is incorrect. Instead, the Temple is composed of both the *protos* and a *deuteros*, symbolizing both the *protos* covenant (the agreement for this present world) and the *deuteros* covenant (the agreement for the world to come.) The *protos* covenant (the Sinai covenant) pertains only to this physical world, and it remains applicable until the time of the reformation. The *deuteros* covenant pertains to the world to come. (p. 70)

Those physical ritual sacrifices cannot remove sin. They do not change a person’s spiritual state on the inside. They “cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience” (Hebrews 9:9). The *deuteros* covenant, the new covenant, is about changing people on the inside, making them perfect for participation in the world to come—the resurrected state. The *protos* covenant cannot do that. The *protos* sacrificial service cannot accomplish your salvation or your re-creation. Only the *deuteros* covenant—the *deuteros* sacrifice of Messiah— an accomplish that. (p.71)

The writer of the book of Hebrews employs a *kal vachomer* (קלוחומר) argument, i.e., a *minori ad maius*: “If such and such is true, how much more so is such and such true.” For this rhetorical device to work, the first thing must be true for the second thing also to be true. So the writer of the book of Hebrews says, “If the sacrifices sanctified and purified the flesh in regard to this present world and within the earthly Temple, how much more so does the blood of Messiah sanctify and purify the spirit in regard to the world to come and the heavenly Temple.” (pp.73-4)

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins and to purify a person for participation in the world to come; that was not their function. The Temple sacrifices are relevant for worship of God in this present world. Messiah's sacrifice can purify a person from sins, and it is relevant for entrance into the world to come. (p. 74)

The Temple, the Aaronic priesthood, and the sacrificial system were never about attaining eternal life or the world to come. If we can grasp that, then we will understand why it is unnecessary to suppose that the gospel supplanted them. It also explains why the early apostolic community remained connected with the Temple and with its rituals and services. They understood Messiah's sacrifice for the world to come, not for this world. It also explains how there can be a future, Messianic-Age Temple, because the Messianic Age, glorious and perfect as it will be, will still be a part of this world, not the world to come. After the Messianic Age, a new heaven and a new earth replace the old. New Jerusalem will descend, and then there will be no Temple of sacrifice. (p. 75)

[emphasis mine throughout]

Appendix

Extracts from *Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel*

It was only in 2019, I think, that I came across the article "Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel," *Grace Theological Journal*, vol 6, no 2: 201-217 by J C Whitcomb. I wish I had read it earlier given its logical and easy to read style and its easy fit into the view of this article. The entire issue of the need for sacrifices and their Millennial inception and importance is well presented and succinctly explained.

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"... the NT, including the book of Hebrews, does not teach that Israel has been forever set aside. It does teach the end of the Old Covenant given by God to Israel through Moses. Yet it does *not* reject the Abrahamic Covenant (which the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 further elaborates ..." (p. 203)

"Israel will indeed be under a New Covenant program, not the Old Covenant given to Moses which was not designed to guarantee salvation." (pp. 216)

"How should Christian participants in the New Covenant view these prophetic utterances concerning a restoration of national Israel to its land, complete with temple, Zadokian priests, and animal sacrifices, especially in the light of the emphatic pronouncements of the book of Hebrews? Liberal and Neo-orthodox theologians dismiss Ezekiel's temple vision as an apocalyptic dream,¹ or a tentative plan for the second temple which the returning exiles never adopted.¹ Most conservative commentators assume that the covenants of God with Israel are being fulfilled in the Church and/or refer somehow to the eternal state. Even some premillennialists, finding it difficult to reconcile animal sacrifices in the millennium with the book of Hebrews, conclude that Israel's new covenant will indeed eventuate in national conversion and divine blessing in Palestine for a thousand years, but without a temple, priests, and sacrifices." (pp. 206-07)

"But what was the precise nature of this "forgiveness" and this "atonement"? To say that it was exclusively a prophetic anticipation of Christ's atoning work does not do justice to the progress of

revelation. There simply is no biblical evidence that the knowledge-content of OT saving faith always and necessarily included a crucified Messiah. **However, in God's eternal purpose, the death of his son has always been and always will be the final basis of spiritual salvation** (Rom 3:25-26).” (p. 209)

“... future animal sacrifices will be "efficacious" and "expiatory" only in terms of the strict provision for ceremonial (and thus temporal) forgiveness within the theocracy of Israel. **Thus, animal sacrifices during the coming Kingdom age will not be primarily memorial (like the eucharist in church communion services), any more than sacrifices in the age of the Old Covenant were primarily prospective or prophetic in the understanding of the offerer.**” (p. 210)

“For non-glorified millennial Israel and her Gentile proselytes throughout the world (e.g., Psalm 87; Isa 60: 1-14; Zech 8:20-23), the continued presence of a sin nature will call for constant instruction and exhortation in revealed truth. Not even a perfect government will automatically solve this deep, universal problem. In distinction from the perfection of the eternal state as described in Revelation 21-22, Christ will "rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev 12:5; 2:27; 19: 15) with strict controls, especially in religious practices (cf. Zech 14: 16-21). Even though outward submission to these religious forms will not necessarily demonstrate a regenerate heart (which has been true in every age of human history), it will guarantee protection from physical penalties and temporal judgments. Those who love the Christ will exhibit a genuine spirit of submission to his government.” (p. 216-217)

“Before the heavens and the earth flee away from him who sits upon the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11), **God will provide a final demonstration of the validity of animal sacrifices as an instructional and disciplinary instrument for Israel.** The entire world will see the true purpose of this system. Of course, the system never has and never will function on the level of Calvary's Cross, where infinite and eternal guilt was dealt with once and for all.” (p. 217)

[emphasis mine throughout]

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Do Sacrifices Provide Forgiveness?

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