

Jesus Fulfills the Old Testament Sacrificial System

Study Guide

Understanding 2.1

Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth and died on a cross, God was pointing to his plan of salvation through the sacrificial system. The main point in sacrifice is that innocent blood is shed on behalf of the guilty. The animals sacrificed have never offended God through disobedience. They give their lives in the sacrifice as a substitute for the guilty. The sacrificial system reminds the sinner that the price of sin is death and that God's plan of salvation would one day provide his perfect sacrifice, the Lord Jesus, to die in our place.

The first instance of an animal being killed to benefit God's people is found in Genesis chapter 3.

Genesis 3:21 And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

God removed Adam and Eve from the garden because of their disobedience, but as he did so he clothed them with animal skins.

Sacrificing an animal as a form of worship is found for the first time in the very next chapter.

Genesis 4:3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,

God makes known his preference for animal sacrifice instead of vegetation. So from the very beginning of God's salvation story we see animals being sacrificed as offerings and worship to the Lord.

In Genesis 8 we find Noah sacrificing burnt offerings on the altar to worship and thank God for deliverance from the flood.

Next we encounter Abraham in Genesis 22. After receiving God's promised son, Isaac, the Lord tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son. Abraham obeys God and prepares his son as a sacrifice. But at the last second, God stops Abraham from killing Isaac and instead provides a ram in the bush to be offered.

Genesis 22:12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." **13** And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Amazing isn't it? God foreshadows the death of his Son, Jesus, by commanding his servant Abraham to sacrifice his promised son Isaac. From the earliest moments of God's salvation story we see the Lord pointing us to the cross where God will sacrifice his only begotten Son centuries later.

The symbolism through sacrifice continues to grow in Exodus 12. God commands Pharaoh to free his people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh stubbornly refuses to his own detriment. God prepares his final judgment against Pharaoh and Egypt.

Exodus 11:4 So Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, **5** and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle.

Look at what God commands his people to do to insure the angel of death passes over them.

Exodus 12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, **6** and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. **7** “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

Exodus 12:12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.

13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

Here we see God using the shed blood of the lamb to deliver his people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Many years later, as God fulfills his plan of salvation, God will use the shed blood of his Son, Jesus, the Lamb of God, to deliver his people from the bondage of sin and death.

God instructs Moses and Aaron in how to offer sacrifices from Exodus 20 to the end of the book. Leviticus starts out with more instruction about offerings and sacrifices. Let's put it this way, by the time we get to the instruction in Leviticus, the people of God have already had many experiences pointing to God's desire to use the sacrifice and offering of innocent animals as acts of worship and acts of deliverance from evil.

God instructs his people about two basic kinds of offerings or sacrifices:

- 1) Sacrifice or offering of worship – sometimes called freewill offerings or vow offerings or drink offerings or peace offerings – these offerings of worship can be the sacrifice of animals, or birds or the offering of grains or food or flour
- 2) Sacrifice of atonement – the shedding of the innocent blood of an animal to cover or remove the guilt of sin from the individual, the community, and the land.

Atonement means to cover over or remove someone's debt. God symbolically covers guilt or removes guilt through the animal experiencing death and shedding its blood on behalf of the guilty. God explains it here:

Leviticus 17:11 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.

Guilt in the Old Testament is defined differently than we define it. In modern times, guilt is largely viewed as an emotion. We feel guilty. In the Old Testament, however, guilt is defined more like an infection or pollution. The individual sinner is infected or polluted, covered in guilt – the community is infected or covered in guilt – even the land is said to be defiled or polluted and covered in guilt –

So the atoning sacrifice is intended to remove the accumulated guilt of both the individual and the whole community as well as the land. The atoning sacrifice is offered on the Day of Atonement for purification.

Much more could be said about the sacrificial system, but remember these:

- 1) The sacrifice was not a guarantee of God's forgiveness.

Isaiah 1:11 “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. **12** “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?

13 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. **14** Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. **15** 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.

It's always about the heart to God. Going through the motions of sacrifice is never enough.

2) The killing of an animal as a sacrifice was never actually effective in removing guilt. It was always symbolic of what God was going to do through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus.

Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

God's goal is to destroy evil without destroying us. If the whole sacrificial system was unable to take away sin, how can you and I be forgiven and received by God? The answer:

While the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament symbolized God's plan of redemption through the shedding of innocent blood, the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the cross of Calvary perfectly accomplishes the covering or removal of sin for all who believe and follow Jesus.

Jesus said it this way:

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Sin has been punished. God's wrath has been satisfied. Jesus dies as an atoning sacrifice. The believer is set free from the penalty of sin – death – through the work of Jesus on the cross.

Hebrews 9:12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** 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, **14** 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.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

God lovingly has made a way to forgive us and maintain his justice by sacrificing His Son Jesus on our behalf. The cross of Jesus fulfills and completes the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament. A modern day Jew will likely say the sacrificial system ended when God allowed the Romans to destroy the temple in 70 A.D. Now atonement for the Jew is considered to be through good works.

But the evidence shows that the sacrificial system has ended because God's work of salvation is complete through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus, the One who gave his life as a ransom for many.

Thank God. Jesus will redeem you if you believe and repent. The work is done.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS:

- 1) Explain the symbolism of the Passover as it pertains to the cross of Jesus
- 2) Why did God command the sacrificial system to begin?
- 3) What does the sacrifice of an animal and Jesus' death on the cross have in common?

4) Why was the sacrifice of an animal ineffective in removing guilt?

5) What did Jesus mean when he said he was going to give his life as a ransom for many?