



Sacrifices & Offerings

And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hebrews 13:16

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Table of Contents

Forward		3
Chapter 1	Understanding reasons for sacrifices	4
Chapter 2	Rituals surrounding sacrifices	10
Chapter 3	Emphasis placed on sacrifices	16
Chapter 4	An attitude of repentance	22
Chapter 5	Obedience is better than sacrifice	30
Chapter 6	A pleasing sacrifice	34
Chapter 7	A sacrifice of praise	43

Forward

In Old Testament times, God accepted symbolic offerings. Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, so God accepted the life of an animal in place of the life of the sinner.

When Jesus came, he substituted his perfect life for our sinful lives, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve. Thus he redeemed us from the power of sin and restored us to God. Jesus' sacrifice made animal sacrifice no longer necessary.

We must recognize that if we want to be freed from the deadly consequences of our sins, a tremendous price must be paid. But we don't have to pay it. Jesus Christ, our substitute, has already redeemed us by his death on the cross.

In the Old Testament, the sacrifice was the only way to approach God and restore a relationship with him. There was more than one kind of offering or sacrifice.

The variety of sacrifices made them more meaningful because each one related to a specific life situation. Sacrifices were given in praise, worship, and thanksgiving, as well as for forgiveness and fellowship.

Jesus' high-priestly role was superior to that of any priest of Levi, because the Messiah was a priest of a higher order (Psalm 110:4). He alone could offer the perfect sacrifice.

Chapter 1



Understanding the reason for Sacrifices and Offerings

Why God may have rejected Cain's offering

Genesis 4:3-5

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

The Bible does not say why God rejected Cain's sacrifice. Perhaps Cain's attitude was improper, or perhaps his offering was not up to God's standards. Proverbs 21:27 says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable—how much more so when brought with evil intent!"

God evaluates both our motives and the quality of what we offer him. When we give to God and others, we should have a joyful heart because of what we are able to give.

We should not worry about how much we are giving up, for all things are God's in the first place. Instead, we should joyfully give to God our best in time, money, possessions, and talents.

Why did God ask that Isaac be sacrificed?

Genesis 22:1

Later on God tested Abraham's faith and obedience. "Abraham!" God called.

"Yes," he replied. "Here I am."

God tested Abraham, not to trip him and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God and thus to develop his character. Just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, God refines us through difficult circumstances.

When we are tested we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character.

Why Hebrews sacrificed a lamb before the exodus.

Exodus 12:3

Announce to the whole community that on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb or a young goat for a sacrifice.

For the Israelites to be spared from the plague of death, a lamb with no defects had to be killed and its blood placed on the doorframes of each home.

What was the significance of the lamb? In killing the lamb, the Israelites shed innocent blood. The lamb was a sacrifice, a substitute for the person who would have died in the plague. From this point on, the Hebrew people would clearly understand that for them to be spared from death, an innocent life had to be sacrificed in their place.

Role of sacrifices and offerings in Old and New Testament

Redemption.

Exodus 12:29-30

And at midnight the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn son of the captive in the dungeon. Even the firstborn of their livestock were killed.

Pharaoh and his officials and all the people of Egypt woke up during the night, and loud wailing was heard throughout the land of Egypt. There was not a single house where someone had not died.

Every firstborn child of the Egyptians died, but the Israelite children were spared because the blood of the lamb had been placed on their doorframes. So begins the story of redemption, the central theme of the Bible.

Redemption means “to buy back” or “to save from captivity by paying a ransom.” One way to buy back a slave was to offer an equivalent or

superior slave in exchange. That is the way God chose to buy us back—he offered his Son in exchange for us.

In Old Testament times, God accepted symbolic offerings. Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, so God accepted the life of an animal in place of the life of the sinner.

When Jesus came, he substituted his perfect life for our sinful lives, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve. Thus he redeemed us from the power of sin and restored us to God. Jesus' sacrifice made animal sacrifice no longer necessary.

We must recognize that if we want to be freed from the deadly consequences of our sins, a tremendous price must be paid. But we don't have to pay it. Jesus Christ, our substitute, has already redeemed us by his death on the cross.

Our part is to trust him and accept his gift of eternal life. Our sins have been paid for, and the way has been cleared for us to begin a relationship with God (Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:13-15, 23-26).

Why God gave instructions for building altars.

Exodus 20:24-26

"The altars you make for me must be simple altars of earth. Offer on such altars your sacrifices to me—your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle.

Build altars in the places where I remind you who I am, and I will come and bless you there.

If you build altars from stone, use only uncut stones. Do not chip or shape the stones with a tool, for that would make them unfit for holy use.

And you may not approach my altar by steps. If you do, someone might look up under the skirts of your clothing and see your nakedness.

Abimelech had unknowingly taken a married woman to be his wife and was about to commit adultery. But God somehow prevented him from touching Sarah and held him back from sinning. What mercy on God's part!

How many times has God done the same for us, holding us back from sin in ways we can't even detect? We have no way of knowing—we just know from this story that he can. God works just as often in ways we can't see as in ways we can.

Symbolism of blood shed during sacrifices.

Exodus 24:6-8

Moses took half the blood from these animals and drew it off into basins. The other half he splashed against the altar.

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They all responded again, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded. We will obey."

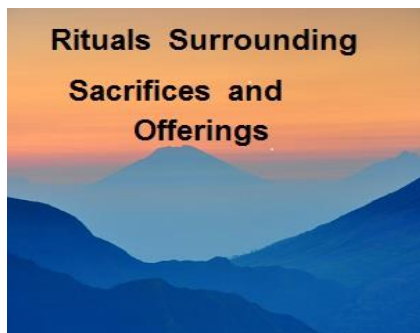
Then Moses sprinkled the blood from the basins over the people and said, "This blood confirms the covenant the Lord has made with you in giving you these laws."

Abraham wanted Isaac to stay in Canaan, but he didn't want him to marry one of the local girls.

This contrasts to the way Hagar selected a wife for Ishmael in Genesis 21:21. To have Isaac stay and marry, or send him back to marry a relative would have been easier.

But Abraham wanted to obey God in the *who* as well as in the *where*.
Make your obedience full and complete.

Chapter 2



Why the detailed rituals surrounding them?

Exodus 29:10-41

"Then bring the young bull to the entrance of the Tabernacle, and Aaron and his sons will lay their hands on its head. You will then slaughter it in the Lord's presence at the entrance of the Tabernacle.

Smear some of its blood on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest at the base of the altar. Take all the fat that covers the internal organs, also the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat, and burn them on the altar.

Then take the carcass (including the skin and the dung) outside the camp, and burn it as a sin offering.

"Next Aaron and his sons must lay their hands on the head of one of the rams as it is slaughtered. Its blood will be collected and sprinkled on the sides of the altar.

Cut up the ram and wash off the internal organs and the legs. Set them alongside the head and the other pieces of the body, and burn them all on the altar. This is a burnt offering to the Lord, which is very pleasing to him.

"Now take the other ram and have Aaron and his sons lay their hands on its head as it is slaughtered. Collect the blood and place some of it on the tip of the right earlobes of Aaron and his sons. Also put it on their right thumbs and the big toes of their right feet. Sprinkle the rest of the blood on the sides of the altar.

Then take some of the blood from the altar and mix it with some of the anointing oil. Sprinkle it on Aaron and his sons and on their clothes. In this way, they and their clothing will be set apart as holy to the Lord.

"Since this is the ram for the ordination of Aaron and his sons, take the fat of the ram, including the fat tail and the fat that covers the internal organs.

Also, take the long lobe of the liver, the two kidneys with their fat, and the right thigh. Then take one loaf of bread, one cake mixed with olive oil, and one wafer from the basket of yeastless bread that was placed before the Lord.

Put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons to be lifted up as a special gift to the Lord. Afterward take the bread from their hands, and burn it on the altar as a burnt offering that will be pleasing to the Lord.

Then take the breast of Aaron's ordination ram, and lift it up in the Lord's presence as a special gift to him. Afterward keep it for yourself.

"Set aside as holy the parts of the ordination ram that belong to Aaron and his sons. This includes the breast and the thigh that were lifted up before the Lord in the ordination ceremony.

In the future, whenever the people of Israel offer up peace offerings or thanksgiving offerings to the Lord, these parts will be the regular share of Aaron and his descendants.

"Aaron's sacred garments must be preserved for his descendants who will succeed him, so they can be anointed and ordained in them.

Whoever is the next high priest after Aaron will wear these clothes for seven days before beginning to minister in the Tabernacle and the Holy Place.

"Take the ram used in the ordination ceremony, and boil its meat in a sacred place. Aaron and his sons are to eat this meat, along with the bread in the basket, at the Tabernacle entrance.

They alone may eat the meat and bread used for their atonement in the ordination ceremony. The ordinary people may not eat them, for these things are set apart and holy.

If any of the ordination meat or bread remains until the morning, it must be burned. It may not be eaten, for it is holy.

"This is how you will ordain Aaron and his sons to their offices. The ordination ceremony will go on for seven days. Each day you must sacrifice a young bull as an offering for the atonement of sin.

Afterward make an offering to cleanse the altar. Purify the altar by making atonement for it; make it holy by anointing it with oil.

Make atonement for the altar every day for seven days. After that, the altar will be exceedingly holy, and whatever touches it will become holy.

"This is what you are to offer on the altar. Offer two one-year-old lambs each day, one in the morning and the other in the evening.

With one of them, offer two quarts of fine flour mixed with one quart of olive oil; also, offer one quart of wine as a drink offering.

Offer the other lamb in the evening, along with the same offerings of flour and wine as in the morning. It will be a fragrant offering to the Lord, an offering made by fire.

Why were there such detailed rituals in connection with these sacrifices? Partly, it was for quality control. A centralized, standardized form of worship prevented problems of belief that could arise from individuals creating their own worship.

Also, it differentiated the Hebrews from the pagan Canaanites they would meet in the Promised Land. By closely following God's instructions, the Hebrews could not possibly join the Canaanites in their immoral religious practices.

Finally, it showed Israel that God was serious about his relationship with them.

Notice the overwhelming emphasis on the holiness of God. The priests, the clothes, the tabernacle, and the sacrifice had to be clean and consecrated, prepared to meet God. In contrast, today we tend to take God for granted, rushing into worship and treating him with almost casual disregard.

But we worship the almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Remember that profound truth when you pray or worship, and come before him with reverence and repentance.

Portray the seriousness of sin.

Leviticus 1:1-3

**The Lord called to Moses from the Tabernacle and said to him,
Jeremiah 7:21-23**

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Away with your burnt offerings and sacrifices! Eat them yourselves!"

When I led your ancestors out of Egypt, it was not burnt offerings and sacrifices I wanted from them.

This is what I told them: 'Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Only do as I say, and all will be well!'

Was there any difference between a sacrifice and an offering? In Leviticus the words are interchanged. Usually a specific sacrifice is called an offering (burnt offering, grain offering, fellowship offering).

Offerings in general are called sacrifices. The point is that each person *offered* a gift to God by *sacrificing* it on the altar.

In the Old Testament, the sacrifice was the only way to approach God and restore a relationship with him. There was more than one kind of offering or sacrifice.

The variety of sacrifices made them more meaningful because each one related to a specific life situation. Sacrifices were given in praise, worship, and thanksgiving, as well as for forgiveness and fellowship.

The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe the variety of offerings and how they were to be used.

When God taught his people to worship him, he placed great emphasis on sacrifices. Why? Sacrifices were God's Old Testament way for people to ask forgiveness for their sins.

Since creation, God has made it clear that sin separates people from him, and that those who sin deserve to die.

Because “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), God designed sacrifice as a way to seek forgiveness and restore a relationship with him.

Because he is a God of love and mercy, God decided from the very first that he would come into our world and die to pay the penalty for all humans.

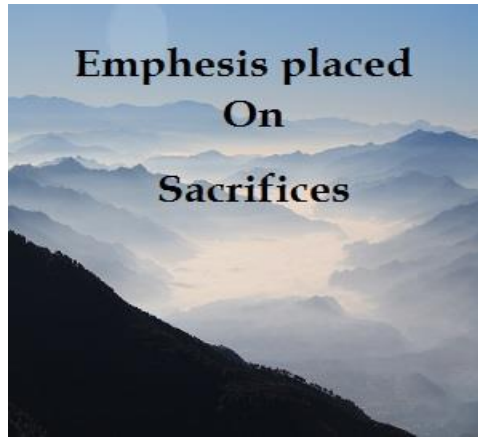
This he did in his Son who, while still God, became a human being. In the meantime, before God made this ultimate sacrifice of his Son, he instructed people to kill animals as sacrifices for sin.

Animal sacrifice accomplished two purposes:

- (1) The animal symbolically took the sinner’s place and paid the penalty for sin, and
- (2) The animal’s death represented one life given so that another life could be saved. This method of sacrifice continued throughout Old Testament times.

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Chapter 3



Why did God place such emphasis upon sacrifices?

Explanation of burnt offering

Leviticus 1:3-4

"If your sacrifice for a whole burnt offering is from the herd, bring a bull with no physical defects to the entrance of the Tabernacle so it will be accepted by the Lord. Lay your hand on its head so the Lord will accept it as your substitute, thus making atonement for you.

The first offering God describes is the burnt offering. A person who had sinned brought an animal with no defects to a priest. The unblemished animal symbolized the moral perfection demanded by a holy God and the perfect nature of the real sacrifice to come—Jesus Christ.

The person then laid his hand on the head of the animal to symbolize the person's complete identification with the animal as his substitute.

Then he killed the animal and the priest sprinkled the blood. He symbolically transferred his sins to the animal, and thus his sins were taken away (atonement). Finally the animal (except for the blood and skin) was burned on the altar, signifying the person's complete dedication to God.

God required more than a sacrifice, of course. He also asked the sinner to have an attitude of repentance. The outward symbol (the sacrifice) and the inner change (repentance) were to work together. But it is important to remember that neither sacrifice nor repentance actually caused the sin to be taken away. God alone forgives sin.

Fortunately for us, forgiveness is part of God's loving nature. Have you come to him to receive forgiveness?

What did sacrifices teach the people?

- (1) By requiring perfect animals and holy priests, they taught reverence for a holy God.
- (2) By demanding exact obedience, they taught total submission to God's laws.
- (3) By requiring an animal of great value, they showed the high cost of sin and demonstrated the sincerity of their commitment to God.

Explanation of grain offering

Leviticus 2:1

"When you bring a grain offering to the Lord, the offering must consist of choice flour. You are to pour olive oil on it and sprinkle it with incense.

The grain offering accompanied all burnt offerings and was a gift of thanks to God. It reminded the people that their food came from God and that therefore they owed their lives to him.

Three kinds of grain offerings are listed:

- (1) Fine flour with oil and incense,
- (2) Baked cakes or wafers of fine flour and oil, and
- (3) Roasted kernels of grain (corn) with oil and incense.

The absence of yeast symbolized the absence of sin, and the oil symbolized God's presence. Part of the grain offering was burned on the altar as a gift to God, and the priests ate the rest. The offerings helped support them in their work.

Explanation of fellowship offering

Leviticus 3:1

"If you want to present a peace offering from the herd, use either a bull or a cow. The animal you offer to the Lord must have no physical defects.

A person gave a fellowship (or peace) offering as an expression of gratitude and a means of establishing fellowship between himself and God. Because it symbolized peace with God, the person presenting it could eat part of the offering.

Explanation of sin offering

Leviticus 4:3

"If the high priest sins, bringing guilt upon the entire community, he must bring to the Lord a young bull with no physical defects.

The sin offering was for those who

- (1) Committed a sin without realizing it or
- (2) Committed a sin out of weakness or negligence as opposed to outright rebellion against God. Different animals were sacrificed for the different kinds of sin.

The death of Jesus Christ was the final sin offering in the Bible (Hebrews 9:25-28 tells why).

Explanation of guilt offering

Leviticus 5:14-19

Then the Lord said to Moses, "If any of the people sin by unintentionally defiling the Lord's sacred property, they must bring to the Lord a ram from the flock as their guilt offering.

The animal must have no physical defects, and it must be of the proper value in silver as measured by the standard sanctuary shekel.

They must then make restitution for whatever holy things they have defiled by paying for the loss, plus an added penalty of 20 percent. When they give their payments to the priest, he will make

atonement for them with the ram sacrificed as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven.

"If any of them sin by doing something forbidden by the Lord, even if it is done unintentionally, they will be held responsible. When they become aware of their guilt, they must bring to the priest a ram from the flock as a guilt offering. The animal must have no physical defects, and it must be of the proper value. In this way, the priest will make atonement for those who are guilty, and they will be forgiven.

This is a guilt offering, for they have been guilty of an offense against the Lord."

The guilt offering was a way of taking care of sin committed unintentionally. It was for those who sinned in some way against “holy things”—the tabernacle or the priesthood—as well as for those who unintentionally sinned against someone. In either case, a ram with no defects had to be sacrificed, plus those harmed by the sin had to be compensated for their loss, plus a 20 percent penalty. Even though Christ’s death has made guilt offerings unnecessary for us today, we still need to make things right with those we hurt.

Explanation of the wave offering

Leviticus 7:31-36

Then the priest will burn the fat on the altar, but the breast will belong to Aaron and his sons. You are to give the right thigh of your peace offering to the priest as a gift.

The right thigh must always be given to the priest who sprinkles the blood and offers the fat of the peace offering. For I have designated the breast and the right thigh for the priests.

It is their regular share of the peace offerings brought by the Israelites. This is their share. It has been set apart for Aaron and his descendants from the offerings given to the Lord by fire from the time they were appointed to serve the Lord as priests.

The Lord commanded that the Israelites were to give these portions to the priests as their regular share from the time of the priests' anointing. This regulation applies throughout the generations to come."

The offering that was waved before the altar was called the wave offering. The part of the offering the priests waved was theirs to keep. The waving motion toward and away from the altar symbolized the offering of the sacrifice to God and his returning it to the priests. These offerings helped to care for the priests, who cared for God's house.

Chapter 4



Must be accompanied with attitude of repentance.

Leviticus 5:5

"When any of the people become aware of their guilt in any of these ways, they must confess their sin.

Why sacrifices weren't allowed outside tabernacle area.

Leviticus 17:3-9

If any Israelite sacrifices a bull or a lamb or a goat anywhere inside or outside the camp and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tabernacle to present it as an offering to the Lord, that person will be guilty of a capital offense.

Such a person has shed blood and must be cut off from the community.

This rule will stop the Israelites from sacrificing animals in the open fields. It will cause them to bring their sacrifices to the priest at the entrance of the Tabernacle, so he can present them to the Lord as peace offerings.

That way the priest will be able to sprinkle the blood and burn the fat on the Lord's altar at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and it will be very pleasing to the Lord.

The people must no longer be unfaithful to the Lord by offering sacrifices to evil spirits out in the fields. This is a permanent law for them, to be kept generation after generation.

"Give them this command as well, which applies both to Israelites and to the foreigners living among you.

If you offer a whole burnt offering or a sacrifice and do not bring it to the entrance of the Tabernacle to offer it to the Lord, you will be cut off from the community.

Why were the Israelites prohibited from sacrificing outside the tabernacle area? God had established specific times and places for sacrifices, and each occasion was permeated with symbolism.

If people sacrificed on their own, they might easily add to or subtract from God's laws to fit their own life-styles.

Many pagan religions allowed every individual priest to set his own rules; God's command helped the Israelites resist the temptation to follow the pagan pattern.

When the Israelites slipped into idolatry, it was because "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 17:6).

The goat idols (also called demons) were objects of worship and sacrifice in ancient times, particularly in Egypt from which they had recently escaped.

God did not want the people to make this kind of sacrifice in the desert or in the Promised Land where they were heading.

How does shed blood make atonement for sin?

Leviticus 17:11-14

For the life of any creature is in its blood. I have given you the blood so you can make atonement for your sins. It is the blood, representing life that brings you atonement.

That is why I said to the Israelites: 'You and the foreigners who live among you must never eat or drink blood.'

"And this command applies both to Israelites and to the foreigners living among you. If you go hunting and kill an animal or bird that is approved for eating, you must drain out the blood and cover it with earth.

The life of every creature is in the blood. That is why I have told the people of Israel never to eat or drink it, for the life of any bird or animal is in the blood. So whoever eats or drinks blood must be cut off.

How does blood make atonement for sin? When offered with the right attitude, the sacrifice and the blood shed from it made forgiveness of sin possible.

On the one hand, blood represented the sinner's life, infected by his sin and headed for death.

On the other hand, the blood represented the innocent life of the animal that was sacrificed in place of the guilty person making the offering.

The death of the animal (of which the blood was proof) fulfilled the penalty of death. God therefore granted forgiveness to the sinner. It is God who forgives based on the faith of the person doing the sacrificing.

Why was eating or drinking blood prohibited? The prohibition against eating blood can be traced all the way back to Noah (Genesis 9:4).

God prohibited eating or drinking blood for several reasons.

- (1) To discourage pagan practices. Israel was to be separate and distinct from the foreign nations around them. Eating blood was a common pagan practice. It was often done in hopes of gaining the characteristics of the slain animal (strength, speed, etc.). God's people were to rely on him, not on ingested blood, for their strength.
- (2) To preserve the symbolism of the sacrifice. Blood symbolized the life of the animal that was sacrificed in the sinner's place. To drink it would change the symbolism of the sacrificial penalty and destroy the evidence of the sacrifice.
- (3) To protect the people from infection because many deadly diseases are transmitted through the blood.

The Jews took this prohibition seriously, and that is why Jesus' hearers were so upset when Jesus told them to drink his blood (John 6:53-56).

However, Jesus, as God himself and the last sacrifice ever needed for sins, was asking believers to identify with him completely. He wants us to take his life into us, and he wants to participate in our lives as well.

Sacrificing children forbidden.

Leviticus 20:1-3

The Lord said to Moses, "Give the Israelites these instructions, which apply to those who are Israelites by birth as well as to the foreigners living among you.

If any among them devote their children as burnt offerings to Molech, people of the community must stone them to death.

I myself will turn against them and cut them off from the community, because they have defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name by giving their children to Molech.

Sacrificing children to the gods was a common practice in ancient religions. The Ammonites, Israel's neighbors, made child sacrifice to Molech (their national god) a vital part of their religion.

They saw this as the greatest gift they could offer to ward off evil or appease angry gods. God made it clear that this practice was detestable and strictly forbidden.

In Old Testament times as well as New, his character made human sacrifice unthinkable.

- (1) Unlike the pagan gods, he is a God of love, who does not need to be appeased (Exodus 34:6).
- (2) He is a God of life, who prohibits murder and encourages practices that lead to health and happiness (Deut. 30:15-16).

- (3) He is God of the helpless, who shows special concern for children (Psalm 72:4).
- (4) He is a God of unselfishness, who instead of demanding blood gives his life for others (Isaiah 53:4-5).

2 Chron. 28:3

He offered sacrifices in the valley of the son of Hinnom, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire. He imitated the detestable practices of the pagan nations whom the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites.

Imagine the monstrous evil of a religion that offers young children as sacrifices. God allowed the nation to be conquered in response to Ahaz's evil practices.

Even today the practice hasn't abated. The sacrifice of children to the harsh gods of convenience, economy, and whim continues in sterile medical facilities in numbers that would astound the wicked Ahaz.

If we are to allow children to come to Christ (Matthew 19:14), we must first allow them to come into the world.

Why priests with defects couldn't offer them.

Leviticus 21:16-23

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron that in all future generations, his descendants who have physical defects will not qualify to offer food to their God.

No one who has a defect may come near to me, whether he is blind or lame, stunted or deformed, or has a broken foot or hand, or has a humped back or is a dwarf, or has a defective eye, or has oozing sores or scabs on his skin, or has damaged testicles.

Even though he is a descendant of Aaron, his physical defects disqualify him from presenting offerings to the Lord by fire. Since he has a blemish, he may not offer food to his God.

However, he may eat from the food offered to God, including the holy offerings and the most holy offerings.

Yet because of his physical defect, he must never go behind the inner curtain or come near the altar, for this would desecrate my holy places. I am the Lord who makes them holy."

Was God unfairly discriminating against handicapped people when he said they were unqualified to offer sacrifices?

Just as God demanded that no imperfect animals be used for sacrifice, he required that no handicapped priests offer sacrifices. This was not meant as an insult; rather, it had to do with the fact that the priest must match as closely as possible the perfect God he served. Of course, such perfection was not fully realized until Jesus Christ came.

As Levites, the handicapped priests were protected and supported with food from the sacrifices. They were not abandoned because they still performed many essential services within the tabernacle.

Why were extra ones made on Sabbath?

Numbers 28:9-10

"On the Sabbath day, sacrifice two one-year-old male lambs with no physical defects. They must be accompanied by a grain offering of three quarts of choice flour mixed with olive oil, and a drink offering.

This is the whole burnt offering to be presented each Sabbath day, in addition to the regular daily burnt offering and its accompanying drink offering.

The Sabbath was a special day of rest and worship commemorating both creation (Exodus 20:8-11) and the deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15). Because of the significance of this special day, it was only natural to offer extra sacrifices on it.

Chapter 5



Saul sacrifices wrongly.

1 Samuel 13:9

So he demanded, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!" And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself.

Rather than waiting for a priest, Saul offered the sacrifice himself. This was against God's laws (Deut. 12:5-14) and against the specific instructions of Samuel (1 Samuel 10:8).

Under pressure from the approaching Philistines, he took matters into his own hands and disobeyed God. He was doing a good thing (offering a sacrifice to God before a crucial battle), but he did it in the wrong way.

Like Saul, our true spiritual character is revealed under pressure. The methods we use to accomplish our goals are as important as the attainment of those goals.

God wants obedience more than sacrifices.

1 Samuel 15:22-23

But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams.

Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king."

This is the first of numerous places in the Bible where the theme "to obey is better than sacrifice" is stated (Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 12:7; Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:8-9).

Was Samuel saying that sacrifice is unimportant? No, he was urging Saul to look at his reasons for making the sacrifice rather than at the sacrifice itself.

A sacrifice was a ritual transaction between man and God that physically demonstrated a relationship between them. But if the person's heart was not truly repentant or if he did not truly love God, the sacrifice was a hollow ritual.

Religious ceremonies or rituals are empty unless they are performed with an attitude of love and obedience. "Being religious" (going to church, serving on a committee, giving to charity) is not enough if we do not act out of devotion and obedience to God.

Rebellion and arrogance are serious sins. They involve far more than being independent and strong-minded. Scripture equates them with

divination (witchcraft) and idolatry, sins worthy of death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6; Deut. 13:12-15; Deut. 18:10; Micah 5:10-14).

Saul became both rebellious and arrogant, so it is little wonder that God finally rejected him and took away his kingdom. Rebellion against God is perhaps the most serious sin of all because as long as a person rebels, he or she closes the door to forgiveness and restoration with God.

Romans 12:1

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept.

When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

Moving from the theological to the practical, Paul gives guidelines for living as a redeemed people in a fallen world. We are to give ourselves to Christ as living sacrifices, obey the government, love our neighbors, and take special care of those who are weak in the faith. He closes with personal remarks. Throughout this section, we learn how to live our faith each day.

When sacrificing an animal according to God's law, a priest would kill the animal, cut it in pieces, and place it on the altar.

Sacrifice was important, but even in the Old Testament God made it clear that obedience from the heart was much more important (see 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24).

God wants us to offer ourselves, not animals, as *living* sacrifices—daily laying aside our own desires to follow him, putting all our energy and

resources at his disposal and trusting him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven.

God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his children. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Because he wants only what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new lives possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them.

Our refusal to conform to this world’s values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs—it must be firmly planted in our minds—“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant.

Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Romans 8:5).

Chapter 6



A pleasing sacrifice

Psalm 4:5

Offer proper sacrifices, and trust in the Lord.

Worship in David's day included animal sacrifices by the priests in the tabernacle. The animal's blood covered the sins of the one who offered the animal.

There were specific rules for offering sacrifices, but more important to God than ceremony was the offerer's attitude of submission and obedience (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Today, a "right sacrifice," one that is pleasing to God, is still the same.

He wants our obedience and our praise before our gifts (Hebrews 13:15). Offer God your sacrifice of total obedience and heartfelt praise.

An outward sign of inward faith

Isaiah 1:10-14

Listen to the Lord, you leaders of Israel! Listen to the law of our God, people of Israel. You act just like the rulers and people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"I am sick of your sacrifices," says the Lord. "Don't bring me any more burnt offerings! I don't want the fat from your rams or other animals. I don't want to see the blood from your offerings of bulls and rams and goats.

Why do you keep parading through my courts with your worthless sacrifices?

The incense you bring me is a stench in my nostrils! Your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath day, and your special days for fasting—even your most pious meetings—are all sinful and false. I want nothing more to do with them.

I hate all your festivals and sacrifices. I cannot stand the sight of them!

Isaiah compared the rulers and people of Judah to the rulers and people of Sodom and Gomorrah. To hear what God wanted to say, the people had to listen and be willing to obey.

When we can't hear God's message, perhaps we are not listening carefully or we are not truly willing to do what he says.

God was unhappy with their sacrifices, but he was not revoking the system of sacrifices he had initiated with Moses. Instead, God was calling for sincere faith and devotion.

The leaders were carefully making the traditional sacrifices and offerings at holy celebrations, but they were still unfaithful to God in their hearts. Sacrifices were to be an outward sign of their inward faith in God, but the outward signs became empty because no inward faith existed.

Why, then, did they continue to offer sacrifices? Like many people today, they had come to place more faith in the rituals of their religion than in the God they worshiped.

Examine your own religious practices: do they spring from your faith in the living God? God does not take pleasure in our outward expressions if our inward faith is missing (see Deut. 10:12-16; 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Psalm 51:16-19; Hosea 6:6).

What was so bad about offering imperfect sacrifices?

Malachi 1:6-8

The Lord Almighty says to the priests: "A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. I am your father and master, but where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have despised my name!"

"But you ask, 'How have we ever despised your name?'"

"You have despised my name by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar.

"Then you ask, 'How have we defiled the sacrifices?'"

"You defile them by saying the altar of the Lord deserves no respect. When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn't that wrong?"

And isn't it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased?

Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is!" says the Lord Almighty.

God charged the priests with failing to honor him (to the point of showing contempt for his name) and failing to be good spiritual examples to the people.

The temple had been rebuilt in 516 B.C., and worship was being conducted there, but the priests did not worship God properly—they were not following his laws for the sacrifices. Ezra, the priest, had sparked a great revival around 458 B.C.

However, by Malachi's time, the nation's leaders had once again fallen away from God, and the people right along with them. The worship of God was no longer from heartfelt adoration; instead it was simply a burdensome job for the priests.

God's law required that only perfect animals be offered to God (see for example, Leviticus 1:3).

But these priests were allowing the people to offer blind, crippled, and diseased animals to God. God accused them of dishonoring him by offering imperfect sacrifices, and he was greatly displeased.

The New Testament says that our lives should be living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1).

If we give God only our leftover time, money, and energy, we repeat the same sin as these worshipers who didn't want to bring anything valuable to God. What we give God reflects our true attitude toward him.

Jesus as the final sacrifice

Mark 14:24

And he said to them, "This is my blood, poured out for many, sealing the covenant between God and his people.

Mark records the origin of the Lord's Supper, also called Communion or Eucharist (thanksgiving), which is still celebrated in worship services today. Jesus and his disciples ate a meal, sang psalms, read Scripture, and prayed.

Then Jesus took two traditional parts of the Passover meal, the passing of bread and the drinking of wine, and gave them new meaning as representations of his body and blood.

He used the bread and wine to explain the significance of what he was about to do on the cross. For more on the significance of the Last Supper, see 1 Cor. 11:23-29.

Jesus' death for us on the cross seals a new covenant between God and people. The old covenant involved forgiveness of sins through the blood of an animal sacrifice (Exodus 24:6-8).

But instead of a spotless lamb on the altar, Jesus offered himself, the spotless Lamb of God, as a sacrifice that would forgive sin once and for all.

Jesus was the final sacrifice for sins, and his blood sealed the new agreement between God and us. Now all of us can come to God through Jesus, in full confidence that God will hear us and save us from our sins.

Old Testament sacrifices compared to Jesus' sacrifice.

Luke 22:20

After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This wine is the token of God's new covenant to save you—an agreement sealed with the blood I will pour out for you.

In Old Testament times, God agreed to forgive people's sins if they brought animals for the priests to sacrifice. When this sacrificial system was inaugurated, the agreement between God and man was sealed with the blood of animals (Exodus 24:8).

But animal blood did not in itself remove sin (only God can forgive sin), and animal sacrifices had to be repeated day by day and year after year. Jesus instituted a "new covenant" or agreement between humans and God.

Under this new covenant, Jesus would die in the place of sinners.

Unlike the blood of animals, his blood (because he is God) would truly remove the sins of all who put their faith in him. And Jesus' sacrifice would never have to be repeated; it would be good for all eternity (Hebrews 9:23-28).

The prophets looked forward to this new covenant that would fulfill the old sacrificial agreement (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people (Exodus 29:38-42). Isaiah 53:7 prophesied that the Messiah, God's servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb.

To pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be given—and God chose to provide the sacrifice himself. The sins of the world were removed when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice. This is the way our sins are forgiven (1 Cor. 5:7).

The “sin of the world” means everyone's sin, the sin of each individual. Jesus paid the price of *your* sin by his death. You can receive forgiveness by confessing your sin to him and asking for his forgiveness.

Hebrews 7:11-17

And finally, if the priesthood of Levi could have achieved God's purposes—and it was that priesthood on which the law was based—why did God need to send a different priest from the line of Melchizedek, instead of from the line of Levi and Aaron?

And when the priesthood is changed, the law must also be changed to permit it. For the one we are talking about belongs to a different tribe, whose members do not serve at the altar.

What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned Judah in connection with the priesthood.

The change in God's law is even more evident from the fact that a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has now come.

He became a priest, not by meeting the old requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be

destroyed. And the psalmist pointed this out when he said of Christ, "You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek."

Jesus' high-priestly role was superior to that of any priest of Levi, because the Messiah was a priest of a higher order (Psalm 110:4). If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save people, why would God need to send Christ as a priest, who came not from the tribe of Levi (the priestly tribe), but from the tribe of Judah?

The animal sacrifices had to be repeated, and they offered only temporary forgiveness; but Christ's sacrifice was offered once, and it offers total and permanent forgiveness.

Under the new covenant, the Levitical priesthood was canceled in favor of Christ's role as high priest. Because Christ is our high priest, we need to pay attention to him. No minister, leader, or Christian friend can substitute for Christ's work and for his role in our salvation.

1 John 1:7

But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.

How does Jesus' blood purify us from every sin? In Old Testament times, believers symbolically transferred their sins to an animal, which they then sacrificed (see a description of this ceremony in Leviticus 4).

The animal died in their place to pay for their sin and to allow them to continue living in God's favor. God graciously forgave them because of

their faith in him, and because they obeyed his commandments concerning the sacrifice.

Those sacrifices anticipated the day when Christ would completely remove sin. Real cleansing from sin came with Jesus, the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Sin, by its very nature, brings death—that is a fact as certain as the law of gravity. Jesus did not die for his own sins; he had none. Instead, by a transaction that we may never fully understand, he died for the sins of the world.

When we commit our lives to Christ and thus identify ourselves with him, his death becomes ours. He has paid the penalty for our sins, and his blood has purified us. Just as Christ rose from the grave, we rise to a new life of fellowship with him (Romans 6:4).

Chapter 7



What is a sacrifice of praise?

Hebrews 13:15-16

With Jesus' help, let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God by proclaiming the glory of his name.

Don't forget to do good and to share what you have with those in need, for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God.

Since these Jewish Christians, because of their witness to the Messiah, no longer worshiped with other Jews, they should consider praise and acts of service their sacrifices—ones they could offer anywhere, anytime.

This must have reminded them of the prophet Hosea's words, "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips" (Hosea 14:2).

A "sacrifice of praise" today would include thanking Christ for his sacrifice on the cross and telling others about it.

Acts of kindness and sharing are particularly pleasing to God, even when they go unnoticed by others.

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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