

## Timeline of Truth: Approaching God through Offerings (Lev 1:1 – 7:38)

Different cultures and religions have offered sacrifices since the beginning of time. Some might argue that Israel stole such ideas from their surrounding nations. Others will see that God first initiated sacrifice after the first sin of our human parents, Adam and Eve. This expectation seemed to continue through their children (Cain killed Abel because of Abel's proper sacrifice, and Cain's improper one).

Some cultures and kings (2 Kings 3:26-27; 16:3; Jer 7:31) have gone so far as to perform human sacrifices, though God has prohibited and condemned such practices. (Side note: Though human sacrifice is not something we think about much today outside of ancient cultures and remote tribes, abortion is really a form of that today. Though it is not done in some religious way to appease gods, it is done because mankind has placed himself as his own god, redefining rights and even life.)

### Erroneous Purposes of Sacrificial Offerings:

- As a gift to appease gods and obtain their favor
- As a magical formula to drive away evil spirits by transferring them to the sacrifice
- As a form of communion shared between the gods (as a meal)
- As an ingesting (eating) of the sacrificial gods in order to gain power
- As an act of dependence to the gods

### The Biblical Purpose of Sacrifices

As an atonement (covering) for sin so that people could approach God, Who is holy. Peoples' sins "were symbolically transferred to animals used to make atonement and propitiate [satisfy] the wrath of God against the sinners (Lev. 1:1-7:38). This purpose is consistently presented from Genesis to Malachi." (Levy, p. 101)

### Sacrifice Before the Law:

- **Adam & Eve** (Gen 3:21): God provided coats of skins to cover Adam & Eve after they sinned. "Although the text does not state that God provided atonement for their sins through an animal sacrifice, it must be assumed that He taught them the concept directly or indirectly through this act of sacrifice. [How did Cain and Abel know to bring such a sacrifice?] (Levy, pp. 101-102) This is when blood sacrifices began, and likely what most cultures can trace the origins of their sacrifices to, though they have been greatly misunderstood and altered in meaning over time.
- **Cain & Abel** (Gen 4:3-5): The sacrifices of these two are the first two sacrifices mentioned in Scripture. Cain offered produce; Abel offered from his flock. God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's offering (Heb 11:4) because Abel met the required blood offering, and Cain did not.
- **Noah** (Gen 8:20-21): When Noah was back on dry ground after the flood, he promptly offered sacrifices of beasts and fowl (Gen 8:20). God accepted these sacrifices, and made a covenant with Noah and all mankind never to flood the world again. (Gen 8:21-22; 9:15).
- **Job**: Job offered sacrifices for his children (Job 1:5). At the end of the account Job offered sacrifices on behalf of three of his inaccurate advisors (Job 42:7-9).
- **Abraham**: Abraham built altars several times and called upon the Lord (Gen 12:7-8; 13:4,18). The building of altars implies the offering of sacrifices, as that is the purpose of an altar. God also had Abraham prepare sacrifices for God to walk through when God reaffirmed His unconditional covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:7-21).
- **Isaac**: Isaac built an altar and offered sacrifices at Beersheba (Gen 26:23-25) when God appeared to him to reaffirm the covenant with him.
- **Jacob**: Jacob offered sacrifices at Bethel (Gen 28:13-17) under similar covenant reaffirming circumstances. He sacrificed at the agreement he made with Laban (Gen 31:54) and at Beersheba before heading to Egypt (Gen 46:1-7).
- **Israel**: The only occurrence of a sacrifice during the 400 years in Egypt was the Passover lamb which became a substitutionary atonement for an entire household, and which was established as an annual requirement at that time (Ex 12:1-14).
- **Formalizing the Covenant**: Israel formally entered into the Covenant ("Mosaic Covenant") through a blood sacrifice. "The covenant was read, accepted by Israel, and consummated by God and Israel through the sprinkling of blood on both the people and the written covenant (Ex 19:5-8)." (Levy, 104)

"The altar in both the Tabernacle and the Temple was the focal point of the sacrifice. The Hebrew word for *altar* is *mizbeach*, which comes from the word *zavach*, meaning *a place of slaughter*. Not only was it a place of slaughter but a place where the atoning blood from the sacrifices was sprinkled." (Levy, 104-105)

#### **The Five Sacrificial Offerings:**

- Burnt Offering (Lev 1)
- Meal (Grain) Offering (Lev 2)
- Peace Offering (Lev 3)
- Sin Offering (Lev 4)
- Trespass Offering (Lev 5)

#### **The Five Sacrifices Offered:**

- Ox
- Lamb
- Goat
- Turtledove
- Pigeon

#### **Five Reasons for the Elaborate Sacrificial System:**

1. Through it people acknowledged that atonement must be made before God for sins.
2. Through it people admitted that another must make substitutionary atonement for them.
3. Through it the blood atonement covered their sins before God, making it possible for Him to withhold judgment.
4. Through it sinful people were able to commune with a holy God.
5. Through it their sacrifices pointed to the day when Christ would once and for all atone for sin (Heb 9:26-28)

*The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah*, by David M. Levey. (Friends of Israel, 1993)