



SACRIFICES OF ISRAEL—PART 1

Origin of Sacrifices: (1) No account of the origin of sacrifice is given in the Bible. (2) The first sacrifice may be the animal that provided clothing for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21; cf. 3:7): perhaps they were instructed to offer a whole burnt offering (meat was not eaten before the flood, Gen 9:3) and keep the skin for themselves (cf. Lev 7:8). (3) Acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices imply a prior revelation of proper procedure from God (Gen 4:4–5; Heb 11:4).

Sacrifices of Cain and Abel: (1) Both brothers brought gift offerings (*minchah* in Gen 4:3,4,5), not expiatory (sin or guilt) offerings. So God did not reject Cain's offering because it was bloodless (gift offerings were usually grain, but animals could also be offered, 1 Sam 2:17). (2) Abel offered the firstborn of the flock and their fat—giving the best of what he had to God (Gen 4:4). (3) Cain's offering lacks a parallel to firstborn and fat: he offered fruit but not the firstfruits to God—he did not give the best of what he had to God (Gen 4:3–4). (4) God first inspected the man and then his offering (Gen 4:4–5); God values the heart condition of the offerer more than the gift. (5) Abel had faith (Heb 11:4) and was righteous (Matt 23:35); Cain was evil and belonged to Satan (1 John 3:12; Jude 11). (6) Cain's offering was rejected because of his unbelief, bad attitude toward God, evil deeds, and lack of faith.

Sacrifices before the Mosaic Law: (1) All categories of sacrifices existed before the Mosaic Law: expiatory offerings (Exod 5:3, 8, 17; Job 1:5; 42:7–9), burnt offerings (Abraham, Gen 22:2, 8; Noah, Gen 8:20–21; Moses, Exod 10:25), fellowship offerings (Jacob, Gen 31:54; Israel, Exod 5:1), and gift offerings (Gen 4:3–5). (2) We must assume a lot of revelation on the meaning and procedure of sacrifices was given by God from the very beginning.

Purpose of Sacrifices: (1) God is the ruler of this world—the sovereign over all peoples and nations (2 Chron 20:6; Psalms 47:2). (2) God is the King of Israel—the ruler of the Theocratic Kingdom (1 Sam 8:7). (3) Voluntary sacrifices were gifts brought by Jews as tribute to their Great King to show their love, appreciation, respect, submission, allegiance, dependence, and servitude. (4) Sacrifices were commanded by God and brought by his subjects: at the three pilgrimage feasts God said, “And none shall appear before Me empty-handed” (Exod 23:15; cf. Deut 16:16–17). (5) Expiatory sacrifices (sin and guilt offerings) were brought to restore fellowship with the Theocratic King; voluntary sacrifices were brought to show dedication (burnt offerings), gratitude (gift offerings), and to have fellowship with (fellowship offerings) the Theocratic King. (6) They showed submission and gratitude by bringing a portion of the results of their work as a gift to God, giving back a portion of the produce from the land owned by the Great King. (7) Sacrifices must be costly to the offerer (2 Sam 24:24).

Sacrifices Are Related to the Angelic Conflict: (1) Giving voluntary sacrifices proves to Satan there are rational creatures in this universe with limited resources (law of scarcity) who are willing to make great personal sacrifices of time and money simply because they love God. (2) These voluntary and costly sacrifices condemn Satan and his fallen angels who had unlimited resources in heaven but refused to offer voluntary sacrifices of service (costing only time) in eternity past to God.

Meaning of Sacrifices: the Hebrew word for sacrifice (*korban*, from the root *krb* “close”) means “that which has been brought close.”

Five Kinds of Sacrifices: (1) Sin offering (*korban chatat*): for purification of sin and ritual defilement (leper, contact with a corpse) (Lev 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30). (2) Guilt offering (*korban asham*): for sin when it's possible to make restitution for damages (Lev 5:14–6:7; 7:1–10; cf. Num 5:7). (3) Whole burnt offering (*korban olah*): the entire animal is consumed on the altar (no meat is eaten by offerer or priests) and stands in the place of its owner as a symbol of his complete dedication to God (Lev 1:1–17; 6:8–13)—as in the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:2, 13) and in the twice daily burnt offering for the people of Israel (Num 28:1–8). (4) Fellowship offering (*korban shelamim*): celebrates a renewal of the covenant with a covenant feast (Lev 3:1–17; 7:11–21; 28–34) in which men, literally, and God, figuratively, partake of the feast (treaties and covenants were usually celebrated with feasts) (Gen 26:28–31; 31:44–54; the Covenant at Sinai, Exod 24:5, 9)—so the addition of bread and wine offerings (Num 15:1–14). (5) Gift offering (*korban minchah*): a gift of grain, oil, and wine (material possessions) brought to show homage and submission to the Great King (Lev 2:1–16; 6:14–23; cf. Gen 4:3–5; 32:17–18; 1 Sam 10:27; 1 Kings 4:21).

Important Distinctions: (1) Sin and guilt offerings were mandatory offerings for fellowship with God; fellowship and grain offerings were voluntary offerings given in fellowship with God; burnt offerings could be mandatory or voluntary. (2) Mandatory sacrifices made atonement for sin by shedding blood; voluntary offerings had nothing to do with sin. (3) The sacrifices were all some kind of food: birds (pigeons, turtle-doves), animals (sheep, goats, oxen), grain (flour, cakes, loaves of bread), salt, olive oil, and wine. (4) The meat was entirely consumed in burnt offerings (only fat in other offerings); the owner ate meat only in fellowship offerings. (5) Destroying an offering by fire made it useless and an irrevocable gift—rising in smoke from the altar to God.

Meaning of Expiatory Sacrifices: (1) Transferring identity (*semikhah*): the owner lays both hands on the head of an animal and leans on it with all of his weight (*semikhah* means “leaning,” from *lismokh*, “to lean”)—in leaning on the animal he (a) is supported by the animal alone, (b) depends totally on the animal to keep from falling, and (c) the animal stands in the place of the owner himself. (2) Authority was transferred by the laying on of hands: the transfer of physical weight by leaning represents the transfer of a leader's weight or authority (the word “honor” means “weight” in Hebrew) to a new leader (Num 8:5–11; 27:18–23). (3) An expiatory sacrifice was essentially an execution in effigy (self-judgment): he stood before God in the Temple and witnessed his own execution by proxy for the sins he has committed—and the animal (his body) was burnt to obliterate every trace. (4) In expiatory sacrifices the animal was the recipient of the punishment that the owner should have rightly received.

Number of Sacrifices: (1) The minimum number of sacrifices offered each year is given in Numbers 28–29: (a) the priests must sacrifice 113 bulls, 32 rams, and 1086 lambs, and (b) more than a ton of flour and a thousand bottles of oil and wine. (2) Sacrifices from laymen because of sin, impurity, vows, or any other reason greatly increased the minimum (Num 29:39). (3) The sacrifices are arranged according to their frequency: (a) daily burnt offerings (Num 28:2–8), (b) the weekly sabbath offering (28:9–10), (c) monthly offerings (28:11–15), (d) once-a-year offerings arranged in chronological sequence (28:16–29:38). (4) The temple was in part a slaughterhouse. (5) The priests often suffered from stomach sickness because they ate so much meat and fat (“Ben Ahijah was over the bowel sickness” *m. Shekalim* 5:1). (6) Huge amounts of salt were needed to preserve the meat.