

Sacrifices



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:9–21; Exod. 12:21–27; Lev. 2:1–3; Gen. 22:1–19; Lev. 17:10, 11; Phil. 4:18.*

Memory Text: “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (*Romans 12:1, NASB*).

Central to the entire gospel is the concept of sacrifice. In the biblical languages, the words for “sacrifice” often depict the idea of drawing near and of bringing something to God. The basic meaning of the Hebrew for *offering* or *sacrifice* describes the act of approaching, the act of bringing something into the presence of God. The Greek equivalent means “gift” and describes the presentation of a sacrifice.

Similarly, the English word *offering* comes from the Latin *offerre*, the presentation of a gift. The word *sacrifice* is a combination of the Latin *sacer* (holy) and *facere* (make) and refers to the act of making something sacred.

This week we will look at some of the sacrifices that believers have offered to God. We will discover that God has always been calling for sacrifices, and He is still doing so today.

Of course, and most important, God provided the ultimate sacrifice, that of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 19.*

The First Sacrifice

Read Genesis 3:9–21. What was God’s response to Adam and Eve after they sinned?

Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world, in a sanctuary-like garden, and God granted them face-to-face communion with their Creator. Their first sin opened a nearly insurmountable breach in their relationship to God. However, God had already planned how to counter such a breach of trust, and even before there came any judgment against them, He gave them the hope of a Savior (*Gen. 3:15*).

“Adam and Eve stood as criminals before their God, awaiting the sentence which transgression had incurred. But before they hear of the thorn and the thistle, the sorrow and anguish which should be their portion, and the dust to which they should return, they listen to words which must have inspired them with hope. Though they must suffer . . . , they might look forward to ultimate victory.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 16.

The Lord showed them the ultimate foundation of that victory when, immediately after His judgment speech, He made for them garments of skin to cover their nakedness and shame. Although unstated, it may be reasonable to assume that an innocent animal had to die for this, and perhaps even that it was understood as a kind of sacrifice (*Gen. 3:21*).

God’s provision of clothes for the culprits became a symbolic act. Just as the sacrifices in the desert sanctuary guaranteed the special relationship between God and His people, so the clothing in the Garden assured the quality of God’s unchanging goodwill toward them.

So, from the earliest days of human history, sacrifices taught that sinful humans could find union with God, but only through the death of Jesus, who was prefigured in those sacrifices.

Reread Genesis 3:9–21. What does it say to you that even before God spoke any words of judgment to the guilty pair, He gave them the promise of “ultimate victory”? What does this say about God’s attitude toward us, even in our fallen state?

Types of Offerings

In Old Testament times, believers could bring offerings on different occasions and in different personal circumstances. Different objects they were allowed to “offer” included clean animals, grain, or drink, as well as other things. The animal sacrifice is the oldest element in the sanctuary service, and together with the priestly service, belongs at the center of the Israelite service. Religious life without sacrifice was inconceivable.

Which kinds of offerings are described in the following texts? *Exod. 12:21–27, Lev. 2:1–3, Exod. 25:2–7, Lev. 4:27–31.*

God established the sacrificial system so that believers could enter into a close relationship with Him. This is why offerings could be brought in all different kinds of situations: for thanksgiving, for an expression of joy and celebration, for a gift, for a petition for forgiveness, for a penitential plea, for a symbol of dedication, or for restitution.

Among the most important types of offerings were the burnt offering (*Leviticus 1*) and the grain offering (*Leviticus 2*), as well as the peace, or well-being offering (*Leviticus 3*), the purification offering (*Leviticus 4*), and the reparation (trespass) offering (*Lev. 5:14–6:7*). The first three were voluntary offerings, which were to remind the giver (and us) that, in the end, everything that we are and all that we have belong to God. The burnt offering symbolizes the total dedication of the one making the offering. The grain offering symbolizes the dedication of our material possessions to God, whether they be food, animals, or something else. The well-being offering is the only sacrifice in which the participant receives a part of the offering for personal consumption.

The other two sacrifices were obligatory. They reminded the people that, though wrongs have consequences, those wrongs can be “healed.” The purification offering, often called “sin offering,” was offered after ritual defilement or after the person became aware of a moral defilement through sin.

The widespread function of the offerings shows that every aspect of our lives must come under God’s control. How can you learn to surrender completely everything you have, or are, to Him? What happens when you don’t do this?

Sacrifice at Moriah

Read Genesis 22:1–19. What did Abraham learn about sacrifice?

What was God’s purpose in this incredible challenge to Abraham’s faith? The patriarch’s life with God had always been accompanied by divine promises: the promise of land, of descendants, and of blessings; the promise of a son; and the promise that God would take care of Ishmael. Abraham sacrificed, but it was always in the light of some promise. However, in the situation described in Genesis 22, Abraham did not get any divine promise; instead, he was told to sacrifice the living promise, his son. Following through on God’s command, Abraham showed that God was more important to him than anything else.

“It was to impress Abraham’s mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man’s redemption. No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

Concerning the sacrifice, Abraham understood two essential principles. First, no one but God Himself can bring the true sacrifice and the means of salvation. It is the Lord who will, who must, provide. Abraham eternalizes this principle by naming the place, “YHWH Jireh,” which means “The-LORD-Will-Provide.” Second, the actual sacrifice is substitutional, one that saves Isaac’s life. The ram is offered “in the place of” Isaac (*Gen. 22:13, NASB*). That animal, which God provided, prefigures the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, on whom “the LORD has laid . . . the iniquity of us all” (*Isa. 53:6, 7; Acts 8:32, NKJV*).

What an astonishing surrender to God! Who can imagine what that experience must have been like for Abraham? Think about the last time that you had to reach out in sheer faith and do something that caused you a lot of anguish. What did you learn from your actions, and how well has the lesson stuck?

Life for a Life

Read Leviticus 17:10, 11. What function does God give to the blood?

In a passage where God instructs the Israelites not to eat any blood, He provides an interesting reason for this prohibition: blood stands for life, and God has made sacrificial blood a ransom for human life. One life, represented by the blood, ransoms another life. The principle of substitution, which became explicit on Mount Moriah when Abraham offered the blood of the ram in the place of the blood of his son, is firmly anchored in God's legal requirements for ancient Israel.

As in Genesis 22, God shows that it is He Himself who provides the means for atonement; in the Hebrew, the *I* in “ ‘I have given it to you’ ” (*Lev. 17:11, NKJV*) is emphasized. We cannot provide our own ransom. God must give it.

The concept is different from that of other religions that use sacrifices. In the Bible, it is not a human who approaches God and knows how to appease Him; it is God, rather, who provides the means for a person to come into His holy presence. And in Christ, He Himself provides the blood for ransom.

Read 1 Samuel 15:22 and Micah 6:6–8. What are some of the dangers of the ritual system?

God never intended the sacrificial service to be a substitute for the attitude of the heart; on the contrary, the sacrifices were to open the heart of the believer to the Lord. If we lose sight of the fact that sacrifices express a spiritual relationship between God and us and that they all point to a much greater sacrifice, Jesus Christ, we could easily mistake the sacrificial ritual for an automatic apparatus for making atonement. Besides sacrifice, God really wants our hearts to be right with Him (*Ps. 51:16, 17*). Consistently the Israelite prophets accused the people of false piety and called for them “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (*Mic. 6:6–8, NRSV; compare Isa. 1:10–17*).

In what ways do we face the same danger as expressed above? Why is it often so hard to realize that we could be doing exactly what the ancient Israelites did in this area? How can we avoid this mistake?

Sacrifices Today/Living Sacrifice

Though after Christ's sacrificial death there was no more need for animal sacrifices, the New Testament does talk about the need for another kind of sacrifice instead.

According to these texts, what kind of offerings are we to bring to God today? *Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15, 16; 1 Pet. 2:5.*

Terminology from the sacrificial system worked very well in describing the early Christian concept of what it meant to live a life totally consecrated to God. In fact, even when Paul was thinking about his martyrdom, he described himself as a drink offering (*Phil. 2:17, 2 Tim. 4:6*).

What specific message is given to us in Romans 12:1? In what ways are we to manifest this truth in our own lives?

A “living sacrifice” means that the entire person is given to God. It includes the dedication of the body (*Rom. 12:1*) as well as the transformation of the inner being (*vs. 2*). We are to be set apart (“holy”) for the sole purpose of serving the Lord. Christians will present themselves wholly to the Lord because of the “mercies of God,” as described in Romans 12:1–11, which presents Christ as our Sacrifice, the means of our salvation.

In this context, Paul's appeal is for Christians to imitate Christ. A true understanding of God's grace leads to a life consecrated to God and to a loving service for others. Surrender of self and the desires of self to the will of God is the only reasonable response to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us.

In the end, there has to be a harmony between our understanding of spiritual and doctrinal truth and our service to others. Every aspect of life should express the believer's genuine commitment to God. True worship is never only inward and spiritual; it must encompass outward acts of selfless service. After all, think about what our Lord has done for us.

Further Study: “It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac’s question, ‘Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ Abraham made answer, ‘God will provide Himself a lamb;’ and when the father’s hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man’s salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 155.

Discussion Questions:

- ① “Our feet will walk in his paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues will bring healing, our hands will lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending; our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.”—John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), p. 322. In what ways does this quote show what it means to be a “living sacrifice”? Why is it that only through death to self could we ever be able to live like this?
- ② As we saw during the week’s lesson, one of the great problems that the people faced was seeing the sacrificial system as an end in itself instead of a means to an end—that end being a life wholly consecrated to God, a consecration that reveals itself in loving service to others. In what ways are Seventh-day Adventists (who have been given so much light), especially in danger of going down the same path, because perhaps we now think that the great truths we possess are an end in and of themselves, instead of a means to the end?
- ③ Dwell more on the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. However troubling this story is, one could argue that it was meant to be troubling, to cause consternation and distress. Why do you think anyone would argue that it was meant, among other things, to evoke those emotions in the reader?

Best Friends for Jesus

Moses is eight years old. He and his family live in the tiny country of Armenia, tucked between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

Moses and his family had just moved to a little village in western Armenia. Moses didn't know anyone there. Then he met Hayk [*hike*], a boy his own age. The two boys quickly became friends. They enjoy playing and riding their bicycles together.

Moses realized that Hayk didn't know Jesus. His family didn't go to church. So, Moses started praying for his friend. He wanted to invite Hayk to church, but first he decided to give Hayk a book about Jesus.

Hayk liked the book and started reading it even before Moses left his house. Mother noticed that Hayk read late into the evening and again the next day. The book has lots of pictures that held Hayk's interest.

Later when Hayk visited, Mother asked the boys some questions about stories she knew were in the book, and Hayk answered them all. Hayk said that he tells his mother the stories that he reads, and now his mother and sister want to read the book too.

A few days later, Hayk asked Moses, "May I go to church with you?"

Moses was surprised and happy. "Of course you can!" Moses said. "I was going to invite you!"

Hayk loves church and wants to go every Sabbath. Children in Armenia don't have lesson quarterlies, so the teacher must read the lesson in Russian and tell it to the children in Armenian.

Hayk is so excited about what he's learning in church that he's invited some of his friends to go with him. One week, five boys and girls attended church with Hayk, and he's looking for more children to invite.

Moses invited Hayk, and now the boys are inviting others. And the church in Armenia is growing.

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MOSES and HAYK (left) share their faith in a small town in western Armenia.