

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

SACRIFICE IN THE AGE TO COME

THE sacrifice of animals goes back to the very beginning of God's dealings with man:

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins [literally, *of a skin*], and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21);

“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” (4:4).

There were clearly laws relating to sacrifice in the time of Noah and during the period of the Patriarchs (8:20; 15:9-17). These laws concerning sacrifice were further amplified in the Law given to Israel by God through Moses. The first seven chapters of Leviticus are full of the detailed regulations that governed Israel's sacrificial approach to God, and chapter 16 specifies exactly what should be offered on the Day of Atonement.

Pointing forward to Christ

In many ways these sacrifices pointed forwards to the greater sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:8);

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins . . . but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God . . . For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:4,12,14).

It might be thought, therefore, that, following the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the concept of the sacrifice of animals would no longer feature in the Divine purpose. The animal sacrifices under the Law could not take away sin. The offering of animal sacrifices was brought to an end with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and has never been re-established by the nation of Israel—despite its having been in existence for over fifty years. What possible purpose could be served by further animal sacrifices?

The evidence of Scripture

There can be no doubt, however, that there are many references in Scripture to the reinstatement of animal sacrifice in the Kingdom age. Consider the following passages:

“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11);

“and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years” (3:3,4);

“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16);

“Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him . . . even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isa. 56:6,7);

“The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on Mine altar, and I will glorify the house of My glory” (60:6,7).

It is evident from the contexts of these passages that they must refer to the time of the Kingdom. For example, whatever anticipatory fulfilment there was of Isaiah 56 in the time of Hezekiah, Jesus’s quotation of this passage in Mark 11:17 shows that it also has a future fulfilment.

No reference has yet been made to the last nine chapters of the prophecy of Ezekiel, which describe in great detail the future temple and the sacrificial work of priests and Levites therein. There can be no doubt that the language of Ezekiel 40–48 is quoted in Revelation 21 and applied to the city-community which is elsewhere described as the bride of Christ. Yet this spiritual application does not negate the fact that several of the other passages quoted above require that there will be a central place of worship in the Kingdom age and that the worship offered there will include the sacrifice of animals. Why will these things be so?

Why sacrifice in the Kingdom?

Jesus commanded all those who enter by baptism into the new covenant to break bread and drink wine “in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19). This weekly memorial reminds fallible mortals of the body which was given in accordance to the command of his Father and the blood which was poured out that forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God might be made possible.

Sacrifice in the future age will not point forward to the offering of another Messiah. It will not be a means for obtaining the forgiveness of sins; that has been done for all time in the sacrifice of Jesus. Nor will it be the means of bringing in another covenant; the new covenant of which Scripture speaks has already been ratified by the shedding of the blood of Jesus. The immortalised saints in the millennial age will not have any need for animal sacrifice.

There is, however, another principle upon which the shedding of the blood of animals will be reintroduced in the time of the Kingdom. It will serve the purpose which the bread and wine achieve now for those in Christ. It will be a memorial of the one great offering which provided the means of taking away sin, which brought in the new covenant and made possible everlasting righteousness. *Nations*, rather than individuals as at present, will have to be taught that these things were not done without great cost, and the reinstatement of animal sacrifice in the future temple and in the isles of the Gentiles is the Divinely appointed means by which these lessons will be taught.

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