

# Easter Series 1 - A Bloody Reality

Today we are going to talk about sacrifice in the Old Testament. Today, when we say that something was “a real sacrifice,” rarely do we mean that blood was shed. For us, sacrifice means giving something up or taking something on that costs us a little money or comfort or convenience. However, sacrifice in the Bible is the bloody reality of a bellowing animal being butchered on an altar.

Imagine the what you would see in this experience—the violent resistance of the animal, the spurting of blood, the feel of pulling the animal apart, the smell of its burning flesh and bones. Imagine the emotional and spiritual impact of offering this sacrifice, knowing that it was your sin that made this death necessary. And imagine the frustration in knowing that you’ll be back tomorrow or next week because you will sin again.

## Burnt Offerings

The burnt offering was the most important sacrifice and was offered at Israelite festivals. The sacrifice was offered every morning and once every evening of the festival. Bringing the burnt offering was a very personal experience, intended most certainly to make an impression on the Israelite offering his sacrifice:

### Leviticus 1:4-5

*4 He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. 5 Then he shall kill the bull before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.*

To make atonement for his sin and to gain God’s acceptance, the offerer identified himself with the animal by laying his hand on the animal’s head. When the animal died, it died for the offerer’s sins. Neither the offerer nor the priest ate any of the meat; it was all burned in the fire. This was sacrifice in its purest form—a valuable animal given up wholly to God.

## Fellowship or Peace Offerings

The fellowship or peace offering was more than a sacrifice, it was a festive meal. A bull, a sheep, or a goat without blemish was shared by the Lord, the priests, and the one who offered it. In fact, the worshiper was allowed to bring family and friends along to eat the meat in the presence of God and the priests at the tabernacle.

The act of the offering reminded the worshiper that the only way he had been able to come back into the joy of fellowship and communion with God was through the blood of a perfect substitutionary sacrifice.

## The Sin Offering

The sin offering was offered to cleanse away the filth of sin. In this offering, something unusual was done with the blood:

### Leviticus 4:6-7

*The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the Lord in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the Lord that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.*

By using the blood of the animal in this way, God was demonstrating in dramatic fashion that it was the blood that atoned for Israel’s sin. The blood cleansed the tabernacle, the priests, the people, and the land from the defilement caused by the sin of the people. There was blood on the veil, blood on the horns of the altar, and blood poured out. Everywhere the sinner looked was an unavoidable statement about the nature of sin and need for atonement.

## **Guilt Offering**

The guilt offering asked for something beyond sacrifice; it required restitution. The guilty person had to confess his sin publicly, offer the blood sacrifice, and also make full restitution of what was defrauded, adding an additional twenty percent. Rather than a cheap or easy repentance, this dearly cost the person who sinned.

### Leviticus 5:15-16

*15 "If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the Lord, he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation, a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued in silver shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. 16 He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest. And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven.*

Yes, there was certainly a cost to these sacrifices. Imagine the expense of taking the best animal in your herd down to the temple in Jerusalem just to be burnt up. That was the animal that would have produced the best offspring, and it wasn't easy to give up. Imagine the time it would take, especially if you didn't live in Jerusalem. You would have to travel and find a place to stay. Imagine the emotional or spiritual burden as you made this trek, knowing that you would have to identify and confess your sin to the priest in offering your sacrifice. But also imagine the burden rolling away. When you slit that animal's throat and watched it burn, and the priest declared your sin forgiven, imagine the sense of relief you felt. You would think, It should be me. I am the one who deserves to die. But this innocent animal has become my substitute. This animal has died so I can live. This was good news. However this was an imperfect system because it was temporary. The person would sin again, and would again have to make a sacrifice.

## **Why Does This Matter Now?**

The sacrificial provisions in Leviticus taught the Israelites that God can be approached only with the blood of a worthy substitute. And while all of these sacrifices might seem like an unbearable burden to us, wouldn't you be relieved, as an Israelite, to know that, instead of paying the penalty for sin yourself, God would accept a substitute in your place?

None of the animals offered in these sacrifices could, in themselves, take away a person's sin or truly pay the debt for sin.

### Hebrews 10:1-4

*1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

The reason it matters to look at the the sacrifices of the Old Testament is to show how us the real cost Sin has.

### Romans 6:23a

*For the wages of sin is death,*

But by offering these sacrifices in faith, the people of the Old Testament demonstrated their faith in God and their future hope Christ, the superior, once-for-all sacrifice, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

### Romans 6:23b

*but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## Discussion Questions

- What comes to your mind when you think of the word “sacrifice”?
- In your own words how would you describe the sacrifices we looked at today?
- Imagine you were going to select one of ***your*** animals for a sacrifice, what thoughts and feelings would you have?
- Why would God require a sacrifice that mattered to you?
- Why do you think God required the death of an animal as the sacrifice?
- Why would it cost more to sacrifice an animal without blemish over one that had flaws?
- What is the significance of God requiring the animal to be without blemish?
- How did the sacrificial system show us a picture of the cost of sin?
- What does it say about God that He allowed a substitute to pay the cost of a person’s sin?
- How would your view of God change if He did not allow a sacrificial substitute?
- How does talking about sacrifices today affect the meaning and significance of Easter?