

Why Millennial Sacrifices

Do Not Undermine the Cross

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One of the most common objections to a future, literal temple, and especially to animal sacrifices during the Millennium, is the false belief that such sacrifices would *deny, reverse, or compete with* the finished work of Christ on the cross. Hebrews 9–10 is often cited as the decisive and argument-ending rebuttal: “*There is no longer any offering for sin.*”

To most Christians, the objection seems compelling. But it rests on a misunderstanding of what the biblical sacrifices actually did, what Christ’s sacrifice uniquely accomplished, and how Scripture distinguishes different kinds of atonement. When those distinctions are clarified, the supposed conflict disappears.

The Cross Ends Atonement for Sin—Not All Sacrifice

The New Testament is crystal clear: Jesus’ death is the final, once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Hebrews 10:10)

Nothing can add to that. Nothing repeats it. Nothing competes with it. But Hebrews is not arguing that *all* sacrifice is forever abolished. It is arguing that no further sacrifice can ever deal with guilt, condemnation, or reconciliation to God. Christ alone accomplished that. The key question, then, is this: Did Old Testament sacrifices only function as substitutionary payments for guilt? The answer is no.

Atonement in Scripture Is Not a Single-Function Concept

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *kipper* (“to make atonement”) operates in more than one way. Scripture itself distinguishes between atonement that deals with guilt before God, and atonement that cleanses impurity for sacred space. These two forms of atonement are related but not identical functions. Let’s break down the differences.

1. Guilt Atonement: Substitution and Propitiation

Some sacrifices—most notably the Day of Atonement—addressed *guilt, divine wrath, and judicial standing*. These sacrifices pointed forward to a substitute who would bear sin.

“The blood...makes atonement by reason of the life.” (Leviticus 17:11)

This category is exhaustively fulfilled in Christ.

“He offered one sacrifice for sins for all time.” (Hebrews 10:12)

No animal sacrifice, past or future, can ever function in this way again. But the Scriptures also describe another form of atonement.

2. Purification Atonement: Cleansing Sacred Space

A second—and often overlooked—category of atonement in Scripture concerns ritual purification rather than moral guilt. This form of atonement does not address judicial condemnation or forgiveness of sins. Instead, it deals with the problem of human uncleanness in proximity to divine holiness, especially within physical, sacred space.

In the Torah, many sacrifices are prescribed not because someone has committed a moral offense, but because ordinary human life produces impurity. Childbirth, menstruation, disease, bodily discharges, contact with death—these are not sins. Yet they render a person ritually unclean and restrict access to holy space (Leviticus 12–15; Numbers 19).

This distinction is critical. Scripture does not equate uncleanness with guilt. A woman who gives birth has not sinned. A person who touches a corpse has not rebelled against God. Nevertheless, both require purification before approaching the sanctuary.

The tabernacle and later the temple functioned as the localized dwelling place of God’s presence. Human impurity, even when morally neutral, defiled that space. As a result, sacrifices were required not to forgive sin, but to remove contamination from the sanctuary itself. This is why Scripture repeatedly speaks of atonement being made for objects and locations:

“You shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it.” (Exodus 29:36)

Altars do not sin. Sanctuaries do not feel guilt. Land does not transgress commandments. Yet all can be defiled by human presence and activity. The sacrificial system addressed this reality by cleansing sacred space so that God could continue to dwell among His people without consuming them. Leviticus 16 makes this especially clear. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest makes atonement not only for the people, but also:

“Because of the impurities of the sons of Israel...he shall make atonement for the holy place.” (Leviticus 16:16)

The holy place needs atonement because people live among it. This is purification atonement. This kind of atonement does not secure forgiveness, justification, or reconciliation.

The New Testament itself affirms this distinction. Hebrews acknowledges that animal sacrifices were effective within this limited sphere:

“The blood of goats and bulls...sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh.” (Hebrews 9:13)

That statement would be meaningless if sacrifices only ever pretended to work. They truly accomplished ritual purification. What they could not do was cleanse the conscience or remove guilt before God (Hebrews 9:9; 10:4). That work belongs to Christ alone.

This distinction explains why Ezekiel’s future temple requires sacrifices even in a redeemed age. The issue is not unresolved sin, but embodied humanity dwelling near unmediated divine glory. As long as God’s presence occupies physical space on earth, holiness boundaries remain necessary.

Purification atonement, then, is not a regression to an inferior system. It is a recognition of a biblical reality: holiness and flesh do not mix casually—even in the Kingdom.

Why This Matters for the Millennium

The Millennial Kingdom introduces a unique biblical reality:

Christ reigns physically on earth

God’s glory dwells visibly in a temple

Many humans remain unglorified

That last point is crucial. Even in a redeemed world, unglorified humanity still produces impurity—not unforgiven guilt, but creaturely uncleanness. Ezekiel’s temple vision repeatedly emphasizes holiness boundaries, restricted access, and purification rituals for sacred space.

“This is the place of My throne...where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.”
(Ezekiel 43:7)

The sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48 are not described as means of justification. They are described as mechanisms for maintaining a purified environment in which God’s glory dwells.

This is why Ezekiel explicitly says the sacrifices are to “make atonement”—not for eternal salvation, but for the altar, the sanctuary, and the land.

Hebrews Does Not Deny Ritual Purification

Hebrews is laser-focused on one issue: how sinners are reconciled to God.

“The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:4)

They never could. But the same passage also acknowledges what those sacrifices *did* accomplish:

“The blood of goats and bulls...sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh.” (Hebrews 9:13)

Hebrews explicitly affirms external, ritual cleansing as a real—but limited—function of animal sacrifice. What it denies is their ability to cleanse the conscience or grant eternal redemption. Millennial sacrifices operate entirely within that acknowledged, limited category.

Not a Return to the Mosaic Law

Another objection quickly follows: *Doesn't this reinstate the Law of Moses?*

No.

Ezekiel's temple is not a reboot of Sinai. Key Mosaic elements are absent—most notably the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, and the Day of Atonement ritual. The sacrifices occur under a Davidic King, not a Mosaic mediator, and within the framework of the New Covenant, not the old. The Mosaic Law is not being restored. Rather, the Messianic Torah will be implemented, and worship is being structured around the actual physical presence of God in Messiah

The Cross Is Not Threatened—It Is Vindicated

Ironically, the idea that future sacrifices undermine the cross assumes that the cross only matters if all ritual worship disappears forever. Scripture teaches the opposite.

The cross secures:

Final forgiveness

Justification

Reconciliation

Eternal inheritance

Millennial sacrifices address none of those things. Instead, they testify to a deeper truth: God truly intends to dwell with humanity again in physical space—and when He does, holiness still matters.

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men.” (Revelation 21:3)

The cross makes that possible. The temple makes it tangible.

Conclusion

Millennial sacrifices do not compete with the cross. They do not supplement it. They do not repeat it. They operate in a different realm, for a different purpose, under a different covenantal administration. The cross deals with sin once for all. The temple deals with holiness in a restored world.

And together, they proclaim the same gospel:
God will dwell with redeemed humanity—forever.