

“A VESTURE DIPPED IN BLOOD”

Revelation 19.13

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Before I ask you to open your Bible, allow me to rehearse how sin has been dealt with down through the history of God’s dealings with sinners. Keep in mind that what is important is not how sinners *felt* they should appease an offended deity, but rather how God prescribed the appropriate method by which a person should address his sin problem in a manner acceptable to God.

This is impressed upon us very early in the Biblical record when we are told, in Genesis 4.3-5,

- 3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.
- 4 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:
- 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

Clearly, there was a right way to worship God and a wrong way, and in Cain’s case, his preference was unacceptable to God, and God’s requirement angered Cain.

In the days of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses tells us in Genesis that they constructed altars upon which animals were sacrificed, with the innocent sacrifice’s blood spilled and the body consumed by the fire burning atop the altar.¹ At that time in history, each man offering a sacrifice functioned as a priest, and the animal that was slain served as the offering that was given to God.

It was not until the time of Moses that we know of explicit instructions given by God for the proper construction of an altar.² When God gave the Law to Moses, along with instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle and the furniture that was to be placed in front of and inside the Tabernacle, the offering of sacrifices was, from that time forward, carefully ordered.

With the Law given, the reason for offering sacrifices became explicit: to atone for sins, which is to say to cover sins from God’s sight for a time by the proper offering of an innocent sacrificial animal and the proper application of that animal’s blood. Accompanying the giving of the Law of Moses was the institution of the Aaronic priesthood, whereby only certain men could function as priests, and the reasons for offering sacrifices, along with the proper steps to take to offer the sacrifices, were carefully spelled out.

The animal to be sacrificed was brought to the priest by a sinner, who then placed his hands on the head of the animal and confessed his sins as the priest slit the animal’s throat in a relatively painless manner. After several steps were executed to prepare the animal’s body, it was placed on the brazen altar and consumed with fire.

The priest would then take a portion of the blood that he had collected from the slain animal and place it where the Law dictated, with the high priest once each year taking the blood of the atonement on the Day of

¹ Genesis 12.7, 8; 13.4, 18; 22.9; 26.25; 33.20; 35.1, 3, 7

² Exodus 20.24

Atonement, Yom Kippur, into the Tabernacle's holy of holies and there sprinkling it on the golden mercy seat, the lid that sat atop the ark of the covenant in which the tables of the Law were kept.³

The typology of Israel's sacrificial system is critical for us to understand. Since the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sins (Hebrews 10:14), it is clear that the sacrifices required under the Law of Moses could only hide sins from God for one year, never actually taking those sins away. Again, the priests offering those sacrifices were of the Aaronic order, meaning they were descendants of the first high priest, Moses' brother, Aaron.

The three components of the sacrificial system given to the children of Israel were the high priest, the sacrifice for sins, and the mercy seat as the place where the blood of the sacrifice was to be offered each year. Those components give us a clear understanding of the way God's Son, Jesus Christ, would deal with sins many centuries later, not by covering sins but by washing them clean away.

Keep in mind that a sinner could not, under the Law of Moses, address his sin problem with God himself, since he was not qualified. A sinner *cannot* approach the holy God. A qualified priest had to offer the sacrifice on behalf of the sinner.

Additionally, the sinner could not satisfy God's righteous demands for the punishment of the lawbreaker without forfeiting his own life; therefore, he needed a qualified substitute to suffer punishment for him. To satisfy God's demand that sin be punished, while sparing the guilty sinner from God's wrath, is the perplexing problem that only God's plan of salvation remedies.

Lastly, the sinner did not have access to the place where reconciliation was made, inside the holy of holies, where the mercy seat that God's glory hovered over actually covered the tables of the Law the sinner had violated by sinning.

On the Day of Atonement, the innocent sacrifice was slain, the high priest took its blood to the only place where atonement could be made (into the tabernacle, past the holy place, into the holy of holies, where the ark of the covenant sat containing the tables of the Law, covered by the golden mercy seat with its two golden cherubim, between which was God's glory).

Israel's high priest would carefully make his way into the pitch-dark room, being cautious not to touch anything lest he die, where he would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat, making atonement for Israel's sins for one year, the blood of sprinkling being between God's glory and God's broken Law.

Advance sixteen centuries, from the establishment of that system of offerings and sacrifices, to the death on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God.⁴ Understand that the entire system of Old Testament sacrifices by the priests, the sacrificial animals, and the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant, were all types, with each one being a symbol of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

In fulfillment of those types, the Lord Jesus Christ did come, born a member of our race to a virgin named Mary, in Bethlehem. Not born of the tribe of Levi or the family of Aaron, Israel's first high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ would be a different kind of high priest, of a different order, not offering sacrifices again and again that only covered sins, but offering one sacrifice that would cleanse away sins for all time.⁵

This is why the writer to the Hebrews identifies Jesus Christ as "the High Priest of our profession" and our "great high priest," in Hebrews 3.1 and 4.14. As our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ discharged the tremendous responsibility of offering to God a fit sacrifice to wash away our sins.

³ Leviticus 1.1-5; 4.1-7; 16.1-14

⁴ 1 Peter 3.18

⁵ Hebrews 7.27; 9.7, 12, 26, 28; 10.10

However, that is not all. Not only is the Lord Jesus Christ the priest to offer the sacrifice, but He is also the Sacrifice. The Law of Moses required sacrifices of innocent animals without spot or blemish. When such a sacrifice was offered correctly, sins were covered from the sight of God, and atonement was made. However, the Lord Jesus Christ is the sinless sacrifice for sins that completely removes sins.

First John 1.7 declares,

“... the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

No wonder John the Baptist identified the Lord Jesus Christ, in John 1.29, saying,

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,”

and again, in John 1.36,

“Behold the Lamb of God!”

Thus, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament typology requiring that sins be dealt with through a priest offering a sacrifice. Jesus Christ is both our great High Priest and the Sacrifice.

You may recall that there is a third aspect of the divine provision for dealing with sins. Not only must the qualified sacrifice die a substitutionary death and shed its blood, as well as the high priest offering up the sacrifice, but the Old Testament pattern also required that the high priest sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat.

It is the consideration of the mercy seat that brings us to our text for this morning, Revelation 19.13. Find that verse in your Bible and stand to read along with me when you locate it. We will read from Revelation 19.11:

- 11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.
- 12 His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.
- 13 And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.
- 14 And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.
- 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.
- 16 And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

This is the Apostle John's record of his vision of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory. The scene is heaven, His armies in heaven are following, and He is prepared to smite the nations and rule with a rod of iron. This is prophecy. The events we have just read have not yet occurred, but the way things are developing in the world, they may take place sooner than many imagine.

Before we address our text, Revelation 19.13, let me clear up confusion in advance by pointing out that the word “vesture,” which translates the Greek word ἱμάτιον, simply refers to a cloak or a robe⁶, and the word

⁶ Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 475.

“dipped” is the Greek word βάπτω, from which we get baptism or immerse.⁷ When the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, He will be wearing a garment of some kind that has a great deal of blood on it.

The scene the Apostle John describes provokes four important questions for us to address:

First, WHEN DOES THE BLOOD ON JESUS CHRIST’S VESTURE GET THERE?

It is reasonable for us to conclude that the Lord Jesus Christ had no blood on His clothes prior to His ascension, since there were occasions where He was not immediately recognizable to His disciples.⁸ If He had blood all over Him, there is no question they would have immediately recognized Him. As well, no such mention of blood on His apparel is found in the Gospel accounts.

Most commentators claim the blood on Christ’s vesture is the result of His engagement in the battle of Armageddon. However, the late John MacArthur correctly discounted that error when he wrote concerning Revelation 19.13, “This is not from the battle of Armageddon, which will not have begun until v.15.”⁹

An examination of Revelation 19.11-15 will bear this out. Thus, it is pretty clearly established that the blood on Christ’s vesture is somehow applied *after* His ascension to heaven, but *before* He returns to earth to fight the battle of Armageddon.

Next, WHERE COULD THE BLOOD HAVE COME FROM?

I have frequently heard it said in discussions about this matter that the blood on Christ’s vesture is the blood of His enemies. However, since it has been shown that He has blood on His garment *before* He comes to earth to fight the battle of Armageddon, one has to wonder where the blood of His enemies came from.

Could the blood of Christ’s enemies be in heaven? I do not think so. To insist His enemies’ blood was in heaven, and that is how it comes to be on His robe, is an argument from silence, since there is no hint of such a possibility found anywhere in God’s Word.

To be completely open about this entire matter, there is no statement that I know of in God’s Word that speaks directly to the matter of *anyone’s* blood being in heaven. However, if the typology of the Mosaic system of sacrifices is any indication, consideration must be given to the Lord Jesus Christ, functioning as our great High Priest, taking His Own shed blood to heaven (which He shed as the Lamb of God), to properly apply that shed blood for the remission of sins.

Thus, though the Word of God does not explicitly assert that Christ’s blood was taken to heaven by our great High Priest, to do so would not be inconsistent with the typology of the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, it would be quite reasonable to conclude that Christ’s blood was taken to heaven, since blood is a major organ of the human body and Christ was raised from the dead so that His body (including His blood) would not suffer corruption.¹⁰

⁷ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1980), page 856.

⁸ Luke 24.15-16; John 21.4

⁹ See footnote for Revelation 19.13 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 2020.

¹⁰ Psalm 16.10

Of course, many argue that this did not happen at all. However, if this did not happen then something horrifying to the Christian occurred, Christ's blood dripped to the ground and remained there to corrupt by rotting in the sun and by consumption by bacteria and insects. Excuse me, but that is not a picture I can live with as a Christian. I will admit to being biased about this. I will also admit to believing in the complete resurrection of Christ's body from the dead, which included His blood, by means mysterious to me.

Third, WHOSE BLOOD IS THIS?

I am persuaded the blood on the Lord Jesus Christ's garment will be His Own blood, for four reasons:

First, it could not be the blood of His enemies in the battle of Armageddon, since this blood will be on His robe *before* the battle of Armageddon begins, while He is still in heaven, just as heaven opens.

Second, it will not be the blood of His enemies, put on His garment while He is still in heaven, since there will be no possible way for the blood of any of Christ's enemies to be in heaven.

Third, it will not be the blood of anyone other than Christ, since there is no evidence angels have blood (having incorporeal bodies) and the blood of glorified saints being on their Savior's garments is a preposterous suggestion.

Finally, the fulfillment of Old Testament typology, of the high priest taking the blood of the sacrifice from the place of the sacrifice's death to the place where the blood was to be sprinkled, is a perfectly reasonable explanation of how Christ's blood comes to be in heaven. The only issue remaining is,

Finally, WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLOOD ON CHRIST'S VESTURE?

Remember the three parts of the Old Testament sacrifice under the Law of Moses? The proper sacrifice must be offered by the right priest, who then takes the blood of the innocent sacrifice and sprinkles it on the mercy seat, the right place.

We already know the Lord Jesus Christ is the proper sacrifice, since He is the Lamb of God. Moreover, we recognize that He is the right priest, being our great High Priest and the High Priest of our profession. The question that remains, however, is whether the blood of the offering has been sprinkled in the right place.

Calvary's cross atop the hill called Golgotha was the right place for the Sacrifice to be slain, corresponding in the Old Testament to the brazen altar in front of the Tabernacle. However, the Aaronic priest would then take the blood of the offering from the brazen altar into the Tabernacle, into the holy of holies, to sprinkle the blood of the atonement onto the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant.

Is the Mosaic Law typology fulfilled in the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ? I am confident that it is. Turn with me to Romans 3.25:

“Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

See the word “propitiation”? ἰλασθηριον is translated “mercy seat” in Hebrews and in the LXX. It refers to that which expiates or propitiates, the means of expiation or the place of propitiation.¹¹ It is the offering that re-

¹¹ Rogers, Jr., Cleon L. and Rogers III, Cleon L., *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1998), page 322.

moves divine wrath.¹² Guess what? Is that not who and what Jesus Christ is, both the place and the means where God's demands for sin's punishment have occurred?

In the Old Testament, the mercy seat was positioned atop the ark of the covenant, placed between the glory of God and the tables of the Law that the Jewish people had violated. In like manner, the Lord Jesus Christ mediates between God and men, perfectly positioned between the holy God and the sinners who so grievously offend Him.

Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ completely fulfills Old Testament typology, and I am convinced that He does. In that case, He is not only the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, and our great High Priest who offers the perfect sacrifice for sins, but He is also the fulfillment of the Old Testament mercy seat, the place where God's justice and demands are satisfied.

This, I am convinced, explains the blood that is all over Christ's vesture. It is His Own blood, placed there when He fulfilled His high priestly duties by applying the sacrificial blood shed on Calvary's cross to *Himself*, the antitype of the Old Testament mercy seat.

Revelation 19.13 reminds us that our returning king is "The Word of God," bringing us full circle from John's opening remarks in the Gospel of John:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

However, that is not all our text accomplishes, in my opinion. Before He ever leaves heaven at the head of His majestic army of saints and angels to reclaim what is rightfully His and establish His kingdom here on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ, with His vesture dipped in blood, thereby reminds even those He will go forth to vanquish that He shed His blood for the sins of His Own.

What a terrifying scene it will be, one day, for you who are lost to see the approach of your destruction in the person of the KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS, with the blood that He shed in view, reminding you of the Gospel you rejected, the sins you refused to turn from, and the destiny that awaits you. You will think to yourselves, "Oh no. The blood covering Him is the blood I rejected."

My Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, my great High Priest, *and* the place where God's wrath is appeased, corresponding to the mercy seat. In short, He is my everything, the all-sufficient Savior of my soul!

Several months ago, I emphasized missions in several messages I delivered to you. And I recently placed before you a consideration of twenty-one cave pastors in the Himalayan mountains of Nepal. What would you say missions is all about? Is it not about our Church pulling together to establish Churches that proclaim to the world that we have a Savior, Who is the answer to humanity's sin problem, and the remedy for mankind's estrangement from God?

His name is Jesus and He is the Christ, the promised Messiah of Israel, and He is at once the Lamb of God, our great High Priest, and our mercy seat, the place where God's demands for the punishment of sins was satisfied.

This is the Savior who saves men's souls. This is the Savior who must be lifted up. This is the Savior we preach throughout the world. This is the Savior you must come to to be saved.

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), page 96.