

THE SANCTUARY DECEPTION

Animal sacrifices? To our modern thinking, that seems to be a bit barbaric. It can suggest all kinds of terrible scenarios, such as killing an animal to appease an angry god or to calm an active volcano. Some may think of dark, mysterious pagan or occult rituals. Animal rights activists would have a field day with the concept! Yet it was part of a system ordained by God in the Old Testament to make an atonement for sin.

From the moment sin entered our world through the fall of Adam and Eve, a sacrificial system was put into place to give them a picture of what redemption would cost. That system required a sacrifice to pay the price for sin. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were clothed in “coats of skins.” To provide those skins, the life of an innocent animal had to be taken. It was the first time the holy pair had ever witnessed death—a death they knew their sin had caused. One author states it this way:

“The sacrificial offerings were ordained by God to be to man a perpetual reminder and a penitential acknowledgement of his sin and a confession of his faith in the promised Redeemer. They were intended to impress upon the fallen race the solemn truth that it was sin that caused death. To Adam, the offering of the first sacrifice was a most painful ceremony. His hand must be raised to take life, which only God could give. It was the first time he had ever witnessed death, and he knew that had he been obedient to God, there would have been no death of man or beast.

AS HE SLEW THE INNOCENT VICTIM, HE TREMBLED AT THE THOUGHT THAT SIN MUST SHED THE BLOOD OF THE SPOTLESS LAMB OF GOD.



"As he slew the innocent victim, he trembled at the thought that sin must shed the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. This scene gave him a deeper and more vivid sense of the greatness of his transgression, which nothing but the death of God's dear Son could expiate. And he marveled at the infinite goodness that would give such a ransom to save the guilty. A star of hope illumined the dark and terrible future and relieved it of its utter desolation."¹

We see this same system of sacrifices repeated throughout the Old Testament by such faithful men as Noah in Genesis 8 and Abraham in Genesis 12. Contrary to common thinking, the sacrificial service was not an attempt to appease an angry god or buy some kind of favor. It was to illustrate the price to be paid as the consequence of sin and the loving forgiveness and cleansing that could come through the gift of God's Son.

LET THEM MAKE ME A SANCTUARY

God, to even more fully illustrate this sacred service, told the children of Israel, *"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them."* Exodus 25:8. When you examine the purpose of the sanctuary service, you find that it was God's desire that when a person or even

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the whole congregation sinned, the "plan of salvation"—forgiveness and atonement—would be worked out before their faces. And a part of this illustrated that He desired to dwell among them, yes, even in their hearts and minds! But let's do a simple examination of what was actually taking place in the service and the message it was meant to convey.

JOHN ISRAEL

Let's step back to the time of Israel, during the exodus from Egypt, and visit a hypothetical man named John Israel. John Israel allowed himself to fall into covertness. His neighbor had some gold jewelry he had his eye on. One afternoon, while everyone was out tending their flocks, John went into his neighbor's tent and stole the jewelry.

Later, a feeling of guilt came over John. He could not rest in peace after what he had done. One sin led to another. First stealing and then lying, and then outright deception. Finally, his conscience got the best of him, and he could not stand it anymore. He knew what he had to do.

He went to his neighbor's tent and confessed what he had done. He then returned the jewelry and asked

his neighbor to forgive him. In the sanctuary service, the nature of the sin determined the type of sacrifice used. John Israel knew what he had to do. He would choose the best of the lambs from his flock—not a defective one, but one without “blemish or spot.”² Perhaps it was his children’s favorite pet. It was the best of the best.

Then he had to walk with that lamb to the Tabernacle. It is said that there was an open distance of about 3000 feet separating the Tabernacle from the camp of Israel.³ As he walked with his offering in that large open space, people watched. They knew where he was going and why. It must have been a shameful, humbling experience.

On coming to the door of the Tabernacle⁴, a priest would come out and in a most painful ritual, John Israel had to place his hands on the head of the blameless victim and confess his sin. Then, taking a knife with his own hands, John Israel cut the throat of the lamb while the soft brown eyes looked up innocently as its life bled out.

Some of the blood was caught for the atoning service.⁵ I can imagine that horror filled John Israel as he looked into the lifeless eyes of the lamb, knowing that it was his sin that caused its death. And here is a key point: He thought, “If this is the price of my sin, I do not ever want to this again.” As people, such as John Israel, went through this painful ceremony, they, in a sense, reenacted Adam’s experience over and over. “If this is the price of sin, I do not ever want to do it again!”

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There is no doubt that God instructed, from the very onset of sin, the sacrificial service. The first service began with Adam and Eve and was reinstated through the Tent Tabernacle and its services. Later, the sanctuary service was expanded into Solomon’s Temple. All these structures served the same purpose and gave the same illustration.

But there is an odd paradox. God, who asked His people to carry out these symbolic services, later said:

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

“When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot

away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

“Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”—Isaiah 1:11-15

Did not God Himself appoint, or require, these sacrifices? Did He not appoint the sabbaths? Did He not say the incense represented the prayers of His people?⁶ But now, for some reason, is it an abomination? Why? Was God seemingly contradicting Himself?

The “Prophet Amos wrote: *“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy song; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.”—Amos 5:21-23.*

Again, did not God require the offerings? Now they were unacceptable? And to think that even their songs and music of worship was considered nothing but noise and He would not hear it? Why did the Lord now not accept the worship of His people?

THE DECEPTION EXPLAINED

We unfold this mysterious deception by turning to the book of Jeremiah:

“Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered’—to do all these abominations?”—Jeremiah 7:8-10.

Do you see what was happening? Here His professed people were repeatedly, deliberately, committing sin and then coming before Him professing to be His people! They were even called by His name. They thought that because they had a provision for sin, they could abuse that provision.

WHY DID THE LORD NOW NOT ACCEPT THE WORSHIP OF HIS PEOPLE?

THE SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS OF THE MOSAIC RITUAL WERE EVER POINTING TOWARD A BETTER SERVICE, EVEN A HEAVENLY

Again: *"Trust ye not in lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'—Jeremiah 7:4.* Yes, they took great pride in the fact they had the Temple of God. Even in Jesus' day, the people of Israel protected the Temple with their very lives, while at the same time plotting the death of Jesus whom the Temple represented! They abused the very privileges they were given.

"Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it!"—Jeremiah 6:19. Here was the real heart of the matter. They professed to be the defenders of His sacred law, yet they continually transgressed it.

The True Object Lesson

God was wanting so much more for His people. He desired these sacred services to bring home the true nature of sin. He desired to administer grace, love and forgiveness for their sins and in turn give them joy and peace. These services were to illustrate the life and death of Jesus Christ who paid the price of redemption.

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."—Isaiah 1:16-20.

The Lord asked them to make a sanctuary so that He could dwell among them. He did not want to limit His dwelling to a building made from animal skins or later in a magnificent temple made from marble. His desire was

to dwell in their minds and in their hearts—so He would be their God, and they would be His people. He desired to use these sacred symbols to teach them about His character and about His justice and mercy as seen in the plan of salvation.

Now catch this! It was His purpose that, as Israel grew in faith and grace, they would become more and more holy, and in return, would become a great witness to the heathen nations around about them. They were to display what God's power could do for and in His people. Through true repentance and conversion, there would have been, over a period of time, less and less animal sacrifices. Instead, they continued to sin and sacrifice, sin and sacrifice, until the courts were full of blood, and the exchange of animals became a lucrative marketplace. This abuse was contrary to the purposes of God.

The Tabernacle a Type of Christ

The sacrifices and offerings of the Mosaic ritual were ever pointing toward a better service, even a heavenly. Christ Himself was the "lamb without blemish and without spot."⁷ His sacrifice was the consummation of all sacrifices. In His death and resurrection is the assurance of our salvation.

Yet in all of this, we see a continuing atonement being made for us in the "true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man."⁸ The blood of the sacrifice had to be taken into the sanctuary to finish making the atonement. The atonement started at the sacrifice and was carried through the whole service before it was complete.

Jesus was also the literal embodiment of both the Sanctuary Tent and the Temple. Jesus said, *"I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days,"*⁹ thus indicating He was that Temple—which represented Him. The Temple was made of earthly sinful materials and dwelt in the midst of sinful men, yet it housed the glory of God's presence.¹⁰ So also Christ's body, His tabernacle was made in "likeness of sinful flesh"¹¹ but it housed the glory of God as God manifest in the flesh.¹²

It is clear that Jesus came to reveal to men the plan of salvation through the true object lesson of the earthly sanctuary service.

Is the Deception Happening Today?

As we have seen, many of God's people in the Old Testament missed the mark and abused the wonderful provisions and privileges that God had granted in His

Sanctuary and its services. People continued to willfully sin and then turned around to abuse the provision of the sacrifices and offerings to make up for their sins. Simply put, they were abusing the system! God was trying to help them to see the terrible price of sin and to awaken in their hearts a hatred of sin and a turning away from it.

In days of old, Jeremiah told them that they committed many sins and then came to *"stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered'— to do all these abominations?"*¹³ The house was called by His name. And today the Christian church is named after Christ. We worship in the "house of the Lord." Are we guilty of the same?

It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking there is salvation or even a personal relationship with Christ in ceremonies, forms, and religious services—even if those services include helping people and acts of good works. Could it be that many today, in their own way say, "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" We can hide behind institutionalism, but if we have not wholeheartedly given ourselves to Christ, then it is all a deception—a deception of the worst kind!

Our praise, worship, music, and church attendance cannot atone for our sins. Christ wants our hearts—to dwell in us, to sanctify us. We are to be His temple.¹⁴ There are well-intending people who say, "The cross, the cross, it was all done at the cross!" not realizing that they are abusing the greatest of all sacrifices made for man. They use what Christ has done as covering for sin or even go as far as to say that we cannot overcome sin, and therefore the only hope we have is to look to the sacrifice. All such thinking is to miss the mark of why Jesus gave His life as a ransom to save many.

Clinging to the Cross

We should cling to the cross of Christ, knowing that in it is our only hope for forgiveness. But more than that, we see the terribleness of sin and like Adam proclaim, "If this is the price of sin, I do not ever want to commit it again." Realize that after the cross came the resurrection—and it is that same resurrection power¹⁵ Jesus wants to bestow on each one of us, that we might live in "newness of life!"¹⁶

May we never be guilty of the error of God's people in days of old. May we ever remember that by the sacrifice of God's dear Son, every one of us may be accepted by

God through Christ. He paid that price for us. Let us not hold back from that which He has paid for.

All heaven must have suffered in Christ's agony. The cross must be a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that sin, from its very inception, has brought to the heart of God. It was my sin that caused the death of Christ. He paid that price for me! I no longer want to participate in that which will bring hurt to Him! Lord, save us from the Sanctuary Deception!

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."— 1 Peter 4:1, 2.

- 1 Patriarchs and Prophets, (Ellen G. White), p. 68
- 2 1 Peter 1:19
- 3 Joshua 3:4-5
- 4 Leviticus 4:1:35
- 5 Leviticus 4:29 ; Numbers 5:7
- 6 Revelation 8:3 & 4
- 7 1 Peter 1:19
- 8 Hebrews 8:2

- 9 Matthew 26:61
- 10 Exodus 40:34
- 11 Romans 8:3
- 12 1 Timothy 3:16
- 13 Jeremiah 7:8-10
- 14 1 Corinthians 6:19; 3:16
- 15 Philippians 3:10
- 16 Romans 6:4 30



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