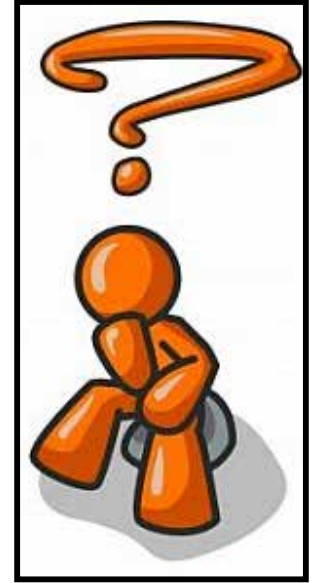


What About ... Animal Sacrifices in the Millennium?

BY DR. DAVID A. DEWITT



Hebrews 10:11-14, 18 *Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time sat down at the right hand of God. ...Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.* The author of the book of Hebrews makes it clear that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross *offered one sacrifice for sins for all time and sat down at the right hand of God.* He concluded, *For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.* Then, after discussing the New Covenant for the Millennial Kingdom, the author wants us to clearly understand that *where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

Anyone who takes the Bible at face value (literally, contextually, seeking the author's intended meaning in a plain, ordinary, regular way) understands that the future of the earth will include an upcoming tribulation followed by the Second Coming of Christ, followed by a millennial reign of Christ on earth. The future Millennial Kingdom is described in many places in Scripture (the label "Millennial" coming from it being called 1000 years six times in Revelation 20). The most elaborate description of the Temple in Jerusalem during that time is in Ezekiel 40–48. Included in that description are repeatedly references to, and even commands for, burnt offerings, peace offerings, grain offerings, and sin offerings (40:38–43; 42:13; 43:18–27; 45:15–25; 46:2–15; 46:20–24). Even the prince of the city [the resurrected King David (Ezekiel 34:24; 37:24-25)] is to offer animal sacrifices. *The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons. The burnt offering which the prince shall offer to the LORD on the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish...* (Ezek. 46:3-4).

So...

Why are there animal sacrifices in the Millennium, if there is no longer any offering for sin?

Many have dealt with this issue by abandoning a literal approach to Scripture, allegorizing the sacrifices into some sort of metaphor. But I suggest that is unwarranted because it involves abandoning the author's intended meaning. Clearly, Ezekiel intended us to understand that there would be animal sacrifices in the future (which because of Revelation 20 we know as a) Millennial Temple. I would like to suggest that the future animal sacrifices are to be

understood literally, as with all of Scripture and any written text. I propose three areas of significance: #1. Memorial, #2. Legal, and #3. Atoning.

#1. Millennial sacrifices are a way to remember the sacrifice of Christ. This is the most common answer of literalists, and it's a valid one. An equivalent question might be, "Why do we take communion in the church?" Answer: Jesus said, "*do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Sacrifices in the future Millennial Temple are in that sense the same, a reminder that *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness* (Hebrews 9:22).

#2. Millennial sacrifices satisfy the legal requirements of God's theocracy. Ezekiel tells us that the animal sacrifices do more than memorialize, they also provide a basis for God accepting His people (43:27). This is much the same as the reason for the animal sacrifices in Leviticus, the result being *and he will be forgiven* (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22). Everything in the Bible is not about providing salvation. Just because there are blood sacrifices, in both the Levitical and Millennial systems, does not mean they have something to do with taking away the sin of the world (Hebrews 7:19; 9:9; 10:1, 4, 11, 18). Actually, all they have in common is that a blood sacrifice is necessary for forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). But the Levitical and Millennial sacrifices do accomplish something. The author of Hebrews confirms that *the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes*

of a heifer sprinkling [for] those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh (Hebrews 9:13).

Williamson says it well:

In short, something genuinely changed when a man brought a sacrifice, but that change was temporal, not eternal... the sacrifices will perform the same non-redemptive functions they performed in the Old Testament, but in an atmosphere where the worshiper clearly sees their significance" ["How 'Literal' Should Interpretation Be? A Critique of the Analogical Hermeneutic," Joel T. Williamson, Jr., page 14].

Any system of laws includes consequences for breaking its laws. Every nation has a legal system that punishes lawbreakers. In Israel, that included the death penalty for some, payback for others, animal and grain sacrifices for others. The sacrifices had nothing to do with paying for the offender's eternal sin. Neither Levitical nor Millennial sacrifices are about making one eternally right with God, both are about satisfying the government. The uniqueness of Israel's government, both Levitical and Millennial, is that both are a theocracy. A theocracy is a government system where God is the ultimate ruler and the rules come from Him.

Ryrie explains,

"In a theocracy, every sin had a Godward facet as well as a governmental one" [Charles C. Ryrie, "Why Sacrifices in the Millennium?" *Emmaus Journal* 11 (2002):304].

In both the Levitical and Millennial systems, the offense was not just a crime but a sin, since it offended the standard set up by God. The animal sacrifice satisfied the law for certain sins, but it did nothing to pay for additional or past sins.

#3. Millennial sacrifices are an atonement, not a propitiation. Ezekiel does not say that the sacrifices of the Millennial Kingdom satisfied God as a payment

for sin. Ezekiel does not say they will be a substitution, propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, or useful for justification. He says they are to make atonement (43:20, 26; 45:15, 17, 20). But an atonement is never an eternal payment for sin. Christ's death on the cross was never called an atonement in the Bible.

Christ's death, as a substitution, propitiation, reconciliation and redemption, was a *once for all action* (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18). Atonement was not. Christ's death on the cross was not a "substitutionary atonement." It was a substitutionary Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus did not die on the day of atonement, He died on the Passover. The day of atonement was about meeting the legal requirements of the Jewish theocracy for one year. Animal sacrifices were a substitutionary atonement, but they were temporary and legal, not propitiatory or redemptive. They were not *once for all*, and they did not pay for sin (Hebrews 10:4). **The cross did not just cover our sin. It paid for it.**

Conclusion

Even though they are not eternally redemptive, animal sacrifices did foreshadow and will memorialize the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world. They show us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

So #1 above is valid, even though not a complete answer.

But we must also recognize #2, that in both the Levitical and Millennial theocracies we have a government that utilizes animal sacrifices to atone for (forgive, not pay for) the disobedience of the people *for the cleansing of the flesh* (Hebrews 9:13).

This temporary judicial cleansing was #3, an *atonement* for the sins of the people, but it did not provide a *Passover* for their condition as sinners before God. Only the blood of Christ can do that.