

Blood & Covenants

Last week, we looked at altars and sacrifices; meeting places between the human and the spiritual to exchange something. A system designed by God to provide covering, so that humans could enter His presence and interact with Him, but corrupted by sin and evil when used in any other way. But the key to God's system is in the **blood**.

Genesis 9:3-4

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

Leviticus 17:10-12

If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

In Genesis, God commands that the blood not be eaten, without explanation. In Leviticus, we get the explanation. God assigns blood as the means of atonement because it represents the life of the creature.

Genesis 9:5-6

And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.”

This, combined with a whole swath of verses throughout the Bible forbidding or condemning human sacrifice, makes it clear that God forbids that practice. Why does God forbid it?

The Bible and Ancient Near Eastern texts indicate that this command was disregarded by both pagans and, eventually, the Israelites as well. When you ask the question 'why,' the general consensus is: the bigger or more important the sacrifice, the larger the ask one could make. This is also reflected in the passages we read last week.

1 Kings 18:26-29

And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

What happens when Baal fails to answer their sacrifice by noon?

When the king of Moab was losing the battle, what is his desperate last resort?

Jeremiah 7:30-31

For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the LORD. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.

As humans grow more desperate, they call upon spiritual power in escalating ways. We see this especially clearly with Saul: When God did not answer Saul, he sought out a medium to raise up Samuel (1 Samuel 28). This is likely the same underlying impulse that leads Israel to slip into things like human sacrifice. They wanted to direct their future, and so turned to sacrifices they believed would allow them to do so. They take things into their own hands, not unlike what Eve does in the garden of Eden.

Covenants

Something else we see over and over biblically speaking is the connection between blood and covenants. Consider:

- Noahic Covenant begins with Noah making a sacrifice. (Genesis 8:20-9)
- Abrahamic Covenant I - Land & Offspring - Sacrifice made. (Genesis 15)
- Abrahamic Covenant II - Blessing of the Earth through Abraham - Isaac Substituted (Genesis 22)
- Circumcision Covenant Sign (Genesis 17:11)
- Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 24:1-8)

Even the idea of the bleeding that occurs during the consummation of a new marriage is symbolic of the forming of a covenant between a husband and wife.

However, there is one Old Testament covenant that notably lacks an associated sacrifice: Davidic Covenant.

2 Samuel 7:12-13

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Now this passage has two layered interpretations: The first is the physical offspring of David being Solomon who does build the temple. However, the kingdom of Israel falls multiple times after this promise is made to David. So the second interpretation leads us to a much later descendant of David. God makes his oath, but the *sacrifice is deferred* to a future act of fulfillment.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Matthew 26:26-28

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus' sacrifice becomes the inauguration of the Davidic Covenant, and the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants that came before it in the creation of a New Covenant. Not only that, but God does not trust the inauguration of this covenant to an animal sacrifice. If human sacrifices are more powerful because they are images of God, then what does that say about a sacrifice of God the Son?

Hebrews 9:13

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrew 10:17b-18

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

There is no more need for the covering atonement, because the sins are washed away *entirely*. And so we see the Old Testament sacrifice system fade into history as markers that pointed forward to Jesus. Truly, Jesus' sacrifice did not lock us out of being able to interact with God, but gave us a *new altar* and *new sacrifice* to offer as part of the *new covenant*.

Hebrews 13:10-12

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Who are those who serve the tent? What altar is the author of Hebrews referring to?

Hebrews 13:15-16

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Revelation 5:8

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Revelation 8:3-4

And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

What are the sacrifices we make now as part of the *new covenant*?

This Week's Takeaway

Is there any sacrifice more powerful than Jesus' sacrifice that could undo His covenant with us? Explain.

Preparing for Next Week

To prepare for class next week, read the following passages and write down a few observations for each passage about the **spiritual being**. This isn't about right answers or deep insight, just jot down what you notice and what stands out in each passage, or what questions you may have. Who is the spiritual being? Are they good or evil? What do they do in the passage?

Genesis 3:1-5; Job 1:6-12; Job 4:12-21; Psalm 82; Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 22:3-6; Revelation 12:7-17;