

**The Tabernacle Today:**  
**Parallels of Dwelling and Atonement**

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# I

## A Dwelling Place

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The first time I read the book of Exodus I remember wondering, "When and why will I ever need to know how to build a tabernacle?"<sup>1</sup> This section of the Exodus text (25-30, 35-40) can be painfully boring to read if one does not recognize the timeless truth found in a deeper analysis. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).<sup>2</sup> It was through this promise that I became convinced that there had to be something more to these grueling tabernacle texts. The breath of God is the breath of life (Gen 2:7) so in light of the aforementioned verse, all Scripture, being God-breathed, should be full of and bring life. As we shall explore in the following analysis, there is indeed something more to the tabernacle of the Old Testament. A closer study of the tabernacle text does not shed light exclusively on itself, but necessarily allows one to observe its use throughout the Bible. Scholars, theologians, and others interpret the account of the tabernacle<sup>3</sup> from many different angles, but it is this broader biblical direction from which this study will come. We will determine the integral role that Jesus played in changing both the face and the place of worship by putting these texts in conversation with Old Testament prophets and the New Testament gospels and letters, concluding that they indeed are both full of life and bring life.

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# I

## A Dwelling Place

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The first time I read the book of Exodus I remember wondering, "When and why will I ever need to know how to build a tabernacle?"<sup>1</sup> This section of the Exodus text (25-30, 35-40) can be painfully boring to read if one does not recognize the timeless truth found in a deeper analysis. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).<sup>2</sup> It was through this promise that I became convinced that there had to be something more to these grueling tabernacle texts. The breath of God is the breath of life (Gen 2:7) so in light of the aforementioned verse, all Scripture, being God-breathed, should be full of and bring life. As we shall explore in the following analysis, there is indeed something more to the tabernacle of the Old Testament. A closer study of the tabernacle text does not shed light exclusively on itself, but necessarily allows one to observe its use throughout the Bible. Scholars, theologians, and others interpret the account of the tabernacle<sup>3</sup> from many different angles, but it is this broader biblical direction from which this study will come. We will determine the integral role that Jesus played in changing both the face and the place of worship by putting these texts in conversation with Old Testament prophets and the New Testament gospels and letters, concluding that they indeed are both full of life and bring life.

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It is clear that the primary function of the tabernacle was as a dwelling place for God among His people. God commands Moses to collect a specific offering from the people to build the tabernacle and says, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them" (Ex 25:8). God's intention in having the tabernacle is so that he may dwell among the people. The Bible also calls the tabernacle the Tent of Meeting (Ex 40:1-2), further testifying to the role of tabernacle as the place where God would dwell, or "meet" with His people. We see that this "meeting" does not refer as much to the gathering of the Israelites as to the place where God would meet His people as He says, "...There I will meet with you and speak with you..." (Ex 29:42b). This idea of meeting was not a foreign concept to the Israelites, as God meets and speaks with the people from Mount Sinai through a radiant Moses, through whom the Abrahamic covenant was finding its fulfillment.

Taking the Israelites out of Egypt is the beginning of the divine fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, which contains two parts. The first promise God made to Abraham was an unconditional promise for both land (Gen 15:18-21) and the deliverance of Abraham's descendants from "a country not their own" (Gen 15:13-14). The second of God's promises to Abraham was a conditional (the condition being total consecration to the Lord) Suzerain-vassal treaty promising to be Abraham's God and the God of his descendants and again, to give them the land of Canaan (Gen 17). These covenants are built upon by the Mosaic covenant (God's covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai). God has been faithful to fulfill His first promise to Abraham by delivering the Israelites from Egypt and must remind them of their role: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus actually contains two similar accounts of the tabernacle, but for the purposes of this paper these will be read as one.

## The Clothing of Priesthood

The practice of God speaking to the people through a mediator of some sort was carried over to the tabernacle in the priests. While God spoke to the people through Moses on Mount Sinai, from over the mercy seat He will speak to them through Aaron and the priests (Ex 29:44, 28:30). The garments of the priests are to indicate one who is fit to come before God without 'incurring guilt and dying' (Ex 28:43). The garments to be made are of the same types of materials as the fine inner curtains: gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen (Ex 28:5). God commands Moses, "Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor" (Ex 28:2). These garments not only demonstrated to the Israelite camp that these priests were men of honor and dignity, but the garments were part of what allowed them to minister in the presence of the Lord. One cleansed of sin is one clothed in dignity and honor and worthy to be in the presence of God.

Clothes have been used to mark the covering of sin throughout the Bible. In Genesis, Adam and Eve sin, are ashamed and hide making covering of fig leaves for themselves (Gen 3:7). God sees their attempt to cover their shame on their own and kills an animal to make them garments of skin. Just as for the Christian today, it is only through blood that sin can be covered. The clothing one wears serves as a physical picture of inner character and identity. In a striking and encouraging parallel to the tabernacle text Proverbs describes the 'wife of noble character' as, "Clothed in fine linen and purple...she is clothed with strength and dignity" (Pr 31:22,25). In John's vision in Revelation God says, "Yet a few people have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy" (Rev 3:4). Here again we see clothing

Just as God had spoken to them from the top of Mount Sinai He would now speak to them from the mercy seat. When calling Moses up to Mount Sinai God says, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction" (Ex 24:12). However, God moves the place of commandment and instruction is moved and we later find him saying, "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (Ex 25:22). The place of commandment and instruction cannot be separate from the place of God, so one sees that the cloud and the glory formerly atop Mount Sinai have moved to cover the tabernacle. Exodus describes the glory and presence of the Lord so vividly, conjuring pictures of greatness, power and destruction somehow coexisting with life. One can almost hear the roar and see the light of this presence as it is described in both cases. A cloud covered Mount Sinai and the glory of the Lord came and rested on it for six days before Moses was called up. This cloud is described as looking "like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (Ex 24:17). The description of the cloud that rests over the tabernacle after it has been completed and anointed by Moses leaves little doubt that it is the same cloud, which both denotes and connotes the presence of the Lord (Ex 40:34). When the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle Moses could no longer enter. It was the ultimate expression of the sacred, holy presence of an omnipotent God. "So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels" (Ex 40:38). The Lord certainly was leading the Israelites into the promised land.

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used as a symbol for qualities of the wearer. White is a color symbolizing purity and those who clothed in it will walk with God. They will dwell with him like the priests of the tabernacle, because they are worthy.

How do Christians today interpret this need for a priest and a tabernacle? What are Christians today wearing and where is the place to meet and speak with God? The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which followed the death and resurrection Jesus Christ, eliminated the need for a physical tabernacle. God no longer needs a building to dwell in for, "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). The portion of this verse that reads, "made his dwelling" comes from the Greek word, "σκηνώω (skay-no-o)"<sup>4</sup>, which can also be translated, "tabernacled."<sup>5</sup> God establishes the tabernacle in the hearts, minds and bodies of believers by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:21-22 tells us, "In [Christ Jesus] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him [Christians] too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

### **Christ as High Priest**

The writer of Hebrews (unknown) goes into great detail describing the relationship between Christ and the tabernacle.<sup>6</sup> The high priest of the tabernacle entered the Holy of Holies once a year bearing the names of the people on his chest and shoulder

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<sup>4</sup> The translation of σκηνώω to dwelling (or dwelt in NKJV) in Jn 1:14 is also found in the book of Revelation (7:15, 12:12, 13:6, 21:3).

<sup>5</sup> Strong's Concordance

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews seems the obvious choice for comparative study of tabernacle texts. However, much of the reference to Christ in the tabernacle in the letter to the Hebrews is obvious and self-explanatory, and will not be dealt with a manner equal to that of more obscure texts.

garment<sup>7</sup> and placed blood upon the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people whose names were written. Hebrews explains Christ's entry as the high priest into a more perfect heavenly tabernacle where he entered the Holy of Holies and placed his blood as an offering to his father and as a final and unblemished sacrifice. The mercy seat atop the ark was also called the atonement cover (Ex 25:17) because it was here that the sacrificial blood covered the sins of the people. The blood of Christ served this same purpose, as God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood (Rom 3:25). The names of believers are no longer written on an earthly breastplate of a high priest, but in a book in heaven. Jesus Christ, the pure sacrificial Lamb of God has written the names of those who believe in the Lamb's book of life (Php 4:3, Rev 3:5, 20:12-15). In his vision of the new Jerusalem John shares:

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple...the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev 21:27)

Hebrews also speaks of an old and a new covenant. We see this new covenant as another step in the Abrahamic covenant, a covenant upon which much is founded. However, Christ is now the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20) and the foundation of the tabernacle to follow. The Old Covenant promises a land that does not yet belong to the believing community, but the New Covenant promises land that has already been claimed by Christ's blood and victory as an inheritance. We read, "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal

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<sup>7</sup> Written on the breastpiece: Ex 28:15-30

inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Heb 9:15).

### **Adoption and Inheritance**

The inheritance of the Christian is the direct result of adoption as sons and daughters of God. The NIV study Bible elaborates on the practice of adoption, which was common among Greeks and Romans of the time. It explains that the laws governing this process ruled that adopted children received all of the same rights and privileges as biological children.<sup>8</sup> Paul explains, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...” (Ro 8:17a). As an adopted child of God, the Christian has rights and privileges equal to those of Christ, God’s natural son.<sup>9</sup> This is achieved by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which has taken the place of God’s physical tabernacle dwelling. In this indwelling act, one observes the development of God’s promise to dwell among his people and “be their God.” The author of Ephesians uses this concept of adoption to elaborate on the covenant promises exhorting, “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:13b-14). The deposit of the Holy Spirit guarantees the promised inheritance of those who God calls His people – the members of the body and family of Christ.

Priesthood in Exodus was to remain in the family, and only Aaron and his sons served as the priests of the tabernacle (28:4). In the same way, members of the believing

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<sup>8</sup> Ro 8:15 NIV text note

<sup>9</sup> See also Gal 4:5; Ro 8:23, 9:4; and Eph 1:5

community, all sharing the blood of Jesus Christ, are heirs, priests and children with Him. As a priest one is allowed to enter in ultimate intimacy into the Holy of Holies and the very presence of God. The law no longer restricts believers to the outer courts, but allows all to commune with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. Jesus leaves his disciples with these words: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20), assuring them of God's promise fulfilled in Him. It is no longer Moses or a high priest that mediates on behalf of believers but Christ, by whose blood the believing community is joined in His family and therefore in His royal priesthood (1 Pe 2:5,9).

By Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit all have gained access to the presence of God. However, the indwelling of the Spirit does not invalidate the significance of the tabernacle because God did not and does not change. At the burning bush in Exodus 3:14 God tells Moses "I am that which I am," which can also be translated "I will be that which I will be." With these words God tells Moses that He is the God of yesterday, today and tomorrow. God does not change. One must still be pure and righteous to enter into the manifest presence of God and behold His glory; and it is still through sacrifice and the resulting blood that one obtains this purity.

Through repeated emphasis and demand in the Old Testament God sets a standard for blood and sacrifice and instills the importance and necessity of these things in the minds of His followers. God forbids the consumption of blood in Leviticus 17:11 explaining, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes the atonement for one's life." This helps set the stage for the acts of Christ, highlights the need for Him and

testifies to the mercy and grace present in His death. Through the tabernacle God reveals aspects of Himself, which one can trust in knowing that God did not and cannot change. Later portions of this paper will explore the concepts of sacrifice, blood and atonement in greater detail, especially noting their place in the tabernacle and role in the New Testament. It was important for the structure of the tabernacle to somehow communicate that it was the place where God and His glory dwelled. Ian Hart refers to the graded nature of the furnishings in the tabernacle, citing the metals, coverings and relative "danger zones" as pointing to increasing majesty.<sup>10</sup> All of the pillars in the courtyard had bronze bases with silver hooks (Ex 27:17) all of the bases for the frame around the inner tabernacle were silver (Ex 26:19), and all of the crossbars and frames surrounding the tabernacle itself were overlayed with gold (Ex 26:29-32). The closer one got to the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, the more intricate, delicate, rare and refined the materials became.

This graded refinement is also evident in the materials that were used as coverings. Hart talks about these in terms of "increasing sacredness,"<sup>11</sup> which can be noted as one moves from the outside of the court to the inner areas of the tabernacle. The covering was composed of tanned ram skins and hides of sea cows (which were native to the Red Sea) (Ex 26:14), the curtains for the tent over the tabernacle were of goat hair (Ex 26:7) and the inside was of blue, purple and scarlet embroidered linen (Ex 26:1,31; 27:9, 16). Christians can see symbolic parallels in this construction in that the closer one gets to God the more he or she will become like Him. As we come into the presence of God we behold His glory, being sanctified and refined by the same consuming fire

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<sup>10</sup> 113 Preaching on the Account of the Tabernacle in *Evangelical Quarterly* v 54 April 1982 pp. 111-116

<sup>11</sup> 113 Preaching on the Account of the Tabernacle in *Evangelical Quarterly* v 54 April 1982 pp. 111-116

experienced by the Israelites (Ex 24:17; 40:38). In this refinement God purifies Christians, like the graded tabernacle coverings, into that which is fine and beautiful. There is no room in the manifest presence of a jealous, loving and perfect God for anything less than the purest, finest things. The cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant are made of pure gold and humbly look away from the glory of the Lord that rises up between them. In the Christian faith we move by grace toward purity that we too may stand humbly before our God as His glory rises up before us.

The structure and contents of the tabernacle are equally as important as the materials with which it was built and adorned. God gave Moses specific and detailed instructions for building the tabernacle and all that it contained. At several points God made it abundantly clear that these instructions were to be closely followed.<sup>12</sup> It is evident that the construction of the tabernacle was very deliberate, as it was to be God's earthly dwelling place. The contents and structure of the tabernacle, as well its aforementioned characteristics bear witness to this fact. The writer of Hebrews describes the items present in the tabernacle as, "copies of the heavenly things" (Heb 9:23). It is important to remember that God is intentional. He can do nothing idle or meaningless; there are no accidents and no mistakes. The items in the tabernacle were designed deliberately by God and He has given His people copies of these perfect heavenly things! Therefore, one would be prudent to closely examine and meditate on these contents of the tabernacle to help make sense of why the long, sometimes grueling explanations and instructions for its construction were necessary. The following chapter will examine one of these parts of the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering, in greater detail. This paper

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<sup>12</sup> Ex 25:9, 40; 27:8; 30:33

will examine both structural and functional components of this altar in an effort to determine its significance in the larger biblical text.

## II

# Parallels of Offering and Sacrifice

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The tabernacle text is filled with descriptions of items and practices that both parallel and shed light on New Testament descriptions of the Christian faith. These items are illuminated in the text as types and symbols of broader theological truths. The tabernacle represents in physical form the intangible aspects of the Christian's relationship with God. One sees God and His desires for His people made manifest in the tabernacle. People often build or decorate their homes to communicate something about who they are or what they enjoy. God communicates something of Himself this way as well, but imagine how incredible a house designed and decorated by the Creator of the Universe must be! God is perfect and must dwell in a place worthy of His character. God first dwelt among His people in the intricate and beautifully exquisite tabernacle, but later chose to dwell on earth in a place more beautiful and complex than even the tabernacle. God chose to dwell in the very hearts of His people. Not with mere words, but with His very breath, God exclusively created humans in His image (Gen 1:27). Therefore, we have the unique position of being the most beautiful creation<sup>13</sup> on earth and a perfect God's chosen dwelling place.

Just as the items in and around the tabernacle testified to the character of God, so too should the parts of a Christian life. A reader can become responsibly involved in the

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<sup>13</sup> Conclusion drawn from David's description of God in Ps 27:4



tabernacle text by viewing herself or himself as God's new chosen dwelling place. Recognizing the importance of the tabernacle for the Christian today reveals and teaches much, as clear parallels exist between Christian life and the tabernacle of the Old Testament. Studying what was contained in God's inanimate, self-designed dwelling place can teach today's Christian a great deal about God's desires for the life of those in whom He now dwells. God uses the items in the tabernacle to point to and reveal Himself, and allows His living tabernacles and adopted children to be used to a similar end. A revelation of who God is gives us a revelation of who we are. Knowing the character and the ways of the one in whose image we are created leads to renewing of the mind and subsequent transformation. It is therefore useful to examine the tabernacle and its contents, which serve as types for many aspects of Christianity.

Much of the symbolism (or typology as it is more appropriately termed) in the tabernacle speaks truth to the Christian today. Reading related texts (specifically New Testament) in light of the relevant and broadly significant tabernacle texts illuminates both texts, allowing the reader to see the interconnectedness of the two testaments. Reading more recent texts in light of older ones sheds light on the more recent texts, but also causes us to view the older ones differently. This concept can be further explained by looking at the example of a lamp. Turning on a lamp in a dark room not only illuminates the room, but also the lamp itself. We see beauty and detail present in the lamp that we would not have seen without the light reflected off the things in the room. In the same way the dynamic Old Testament texts are further illuminated as more is revealed about their purpose and function. New Testament writers add to, enhance, and reinterpret these texts in several ways, which we shall encounter in a latter portion of this

paper. The following section will seek to explore one of these items, the altar of burnt offering, and delve into its significance as a place of offering, sacrifice and atonement. The characteristics and uses of this altar will be observed and read in the context of parallel biblical texts.

### **The Altar of Burnt Offering**

The first thing one would see when entering the outer courts of the tabernacle was a large altar for burnt offering (Ex 27:1-8, 38:1-7). This altar was made of acacia wood, a tough, resilient wood that comes from both acacia trees and shrubs. The top of the altar was square and was to have horns extending from each of its four corners (more like long upward-extending points, not literally like those of a bull or antelope) as one piece with it. In line with the theory of the graded refinement of materials the altar, necessary tools and utensils, grating, rings and the poles for carrying the altar were all covered with bronze.

This altar for burnt offerings was sturdy and crude in appearance, matching its function well. Additionally aiding in its function, the altar was hollow and had a grate halfway between the top and the bottom. This would have allowed ash to fall through to the earth and the sacrifice to burn more easily. This altar was made to endure a great deal of harsh treatment and was certainly meager in terms of construction and appearance. Though the appearance of the altar was important, it was not important for it to appear beautiful or ornate. Like a well-used fire pit the altar was to be crude as its purpose necessitated.

The location of the altar of burnt offering was such that everyone would have to pass by it as they entered the tabernacle courtyard. The sacrifice laws outlined in Leviticus establish that, "The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out" (5:13). The altar's location was also prominent in that the smoke of these constantly burning offerings and sacrifices would have been visible high above the walls of the courtyard, serving as a constant reminder to the encamped tribes surrounding the tabernacle. Much of Leviticus is devoted to outlining these laws of sacrifice (chapters 1-7 specifically). Many who at one point in life decide to ambitiously read through the whole Bible find the book of Leviticus an effective progress-hindering wall. Unfortunately, many skip over it (and the next two for that matter) or stop reading entirely. Why would so much of the Bible be devoted to specific, complex laws of sacrifice? For many of these laws there seems to be no practical purpose outside purely teaching obedience, which we know God values, but this still does not seem to answer our question.

To discover why this large portion of the text is devoted to laws regarding sacrifice, one must move beyond the immediate text to consider its implications for the Bible as a whole. The whole Bible points to Christ, and the laws of sacrifice anticipate him. It is the nature of an infinite God to be capable of seeing backwards and forwards at the same time. God always knew that He was going to send Jesus to dwell among His children and to die as atonement for their sins. Jesus was not a response to God realizing that His first plan was not working. It would have been illogical for God to begin, without a precedent of sacrifice and by implication no law, by sending His son and having Him die on a cross. People simply would not have understood how this atones for

sin (sin that in the absence of the law would not have even been realized). For people to realize their need for Christ and recognize him as their Savior, they need to recognize sacrifice as the means of atonement. The sacrifice laws demonstrate the necessity and perfection of Christ's final sacrifice and testify to the unity of the two testaments. The life is in the blood and these laws set the stage for Jesus' sacrifice of His own life-giving blood.

The presence and purpose of these laws is important to note at this point because of the role the altar of burnt offering plays in their observation. The altar of burnt offering is the place where offering and sacrifice occurred. This altar parallels the cross and is a symbol for it based on several of its qualities. The cross, like the bronze covered altar, was crude and unadorned. Both were made mostly of wood, the cross of an unknown type<sup>14</sup> and the altar of acacia wood. These plain places of sacrifice were strongly associated with both holiness and forgiveness. However, they in themselves were not holy, nor did they provide forgiveness. They simply served as the stage for this to occur. Therefore, they had to be plain, reflecting their purpose and pointing to the sacrifice occurring upon them.

The altar's association with holiness is highlighted as Yahweh instructs Moses saying, "These are the regulations for sin offering: the sin offering is to be slaughtered before the Lord in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy" (Lev 6:25). It is not the altar that is holy, but the sacrifice that is upon the altar. It is not the cross that is holy, but Christ who offered Himself as a sacrifice to die upon it. Throughout both testaments the word "holy" refers to God or to those things, people or places in which

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<sup>14</sup> Some accounts cite an inexpensive wood, like oak or pine as the wood used for crucifixion, but acacia wood, though quite heavy, was prevalent around Jerusalem and could possibly have been used.

God is present and has purified. To be holy is to be set apart. Holiness is absolute moral purity and freedom from sin and has been perfected on earth only by Christ.

The common centrality of God's forgiveness in these places of offering and sacrifice provides evidence for the altar being a symbol for the cross. For the Israelites, the altar served as a symbol of God's forgiveness as granted through specific, repeated earthly sacrifice. In a relatively small portion of the Levitical text regarding sin offering the phrase "the priest will make atonement for...and he will be forgiven" occurs a notable nine times (4:20-6:7). The frequency of this phrase points to it as very important and in the context of Jesus' priesthood it even takes a prophetic tone. For Christians today, the cross serves as a symbol of God's forgiveness as granted through Christ (the priest). The author of Acts<sup>15</sup> instructs Theophilus and his other readers that forgiveness comes through Jesus in a way that it could not through the Levitical sacrifice laws. He teaches:

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39)

Through these texts we see how God sets a precedent for sacrifice as the means of atonement. Through created things God moves people toward an understanding of Christ's redemptive act and establishes the necessity of blood for the cleansing and forgiveness of sin. Paul sums this up well early in his letter to the Ephesians. He writes, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph 1:7-8).

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<sup>15</sup> Luke, by general consensus

Just as the altar parallels the cross, the burnt offering parallels Jesus Christ. Being covered in blood either intentionally or by circumstance, neither place of sacrifice served a glamorous function. The process for making a mandatory sin offering is described in Leviticus in great detail (Lev 4:1-5:13, 6:24-30). Different processes are outlined for different circumstances but all hold central aspects in common. In all cases of sin offering the resulting blood was to be placed on part of one of the two altars.<sup>16</sup> The priest was then required to pour the remaining blood out at the base of the altar of burnt offering (Lev 4:7, 4:18, 4:25, 4:30, 4:34, 5:9). Near the beginning of his ministry Jesus made enough bread out of seven loaves to feed four thousand and still have seven loaves left over (Mk 8:1-9). Seven is considered a number of perfection in the Bible and is used throughout to denote this. People ate bread until they were satisfied but there was still bread left over – the supply was not depleted. This story is not written to parallel the practices surrounding sin offering, but it works nicely to illustrate and bring a bit more clarity to our point.

After the blood from a slaughtered animal of sin offering was sprinkled on all that was required there was still blood remaining to be poured out at the base of the altar. Keeping in mind that the altar parallels the cross we turn to Jesus' death. While celebrating Passover with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus offers His disciples wine and says, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:27-28). John confirms the fulfillment of this statement reporting, "Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus'

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<sup>16</sup> Either the altar of incense or the altar of burnt offering and most often on the horns of one of these two (Lev 4:7, 4:18, 4:25, 4:30, 4:34), except in the case of the offering of young doves or pigeons for a member of the community. Birds were offered if a person was too poor to afford a goat or lamb (Lev 5:7) and the blood of one of them was sprinkled against the side of the altar of burnt offering (Lev 5:9).

side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water" (Jn 19:34). Jesus commanded all of His disciples to drink of His blood, but there still remained enough to pour out. Like the seven loaves, the blood of Christ is perfect and nothing more is needed to atone for sin. After the blood of Jesus Christ has been figuratively placed on and drank by every believer the supply is still not depleted. We are not to doubt the power of Christ's sacrifice, for there is nothing too big for the blood of the Lamb to cover. His sacrifice is perfect and His blood is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

In addition to its structure and the pouring out of blood at its base, the altar of burnt offering and the laws regulating its use consume a great deal of the Levitical text. This provokes the question of why would so much of the Bible be devoted to these seemingly mundane details. Paradoxically, the answer to this question can be found in the very texts that provoked it. At the end of the book of Exodus, Moses finishes setting up and anointing the tabernacle the book and the glory of the Lord finally comes to rest over it. Through this process God has made the tabernacle His dwelling place and at the beginning of Leviticus the Lord calls to Moses from within it. The first things God speaks to Moses about are the sacrifice laws. What would cause God to address this before anything else? God created humans to enjoy relationship and communion with Him. We must remember that God dwells in the tabernacle as a fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, Moses and the people to dwell among them and be their God. Now that God dwells in the tabernacle He wants to also be able to commune with his people. The tabernacle allows God to physically dwell among the people, but He also wants to dwell among them and be their God spiritually. God cannot dwell in a place where there

is sin, so the sins of the Israelites must be atoned for to allow God to commune with and dwell among his people as he desires. The blood of sacrifice is the means for doing this. God's interest in the fulfillment of His promises and relationship with those created in His image is his motivation for introducing sacrifice laws first.

God emphasizes sacrifice by introducing these laws first, but also by the fact that the altar of burnt offering would have been the most prominent and visible thing upon entering the tabernacle. As previously mentioned, the altar of burnt offering was placed just inside the entrance to the tabernacle courts (Ex 40:6, 29). It would have been sprinkled with blood, unintentionally due to its function and intentionally in response to the law (Lev 1:5,11). Upon entering, the altar and its continuously burning sacrifice (Lev 6:9, 12, 13) would likely not go unnoticed. The offering would have even been seen from outside the walls of the tabernacle as the smoke rose to the sky. Several of these structural, situational aspects of the tabernacle parallel the cross of Christ as tied to Roman crucifixion practices in a variety of ways. The cross, like the altar, would have had blood over all sides from being carried on Jesus' flogged back. It was prominent, visible and has today become a symbolic focal point by which Christ's death is remembered.

Similar to modern capital punishment, Roman crucifixions were meant to make an example of people and dramatically dissuade others from breaking the law. Therefore, it was important these events be public and visible. Jesus was crucified with two criminals at a place called Golgotha, or The Place of the Skull, which was located outside the walls of Jerusalem (Mt 27:33, Mk 15:22, Lk 23:33, Jn 19:17). Currently, some believe this place to be located inside the walls of Jerusalem as a result of city expansion



and the subsequent relocation of its walls. Perhaps a little disagreement about the location of the crucifixion is desirable so that people are not drawn to a place, but to the man who died there. Despite these largely insignificant differences in opinion there is little argument that at the time of Jesus' crucifixion this site would have been located outside the city's walls. Traditional crucifixion practices lead to a common conclusion that Golgotha was itself a hill or was located on a hill. Both geographically and logically the probability of this is quite high. The hilly and mountainous land surrounding Jerusalem would have provided an ideal setting for a very public crucifixion.

John writes, "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign for the place that Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek" (19:19-20). The fact that three languages were inscribed on this sign attests to the huge number and variety of people who would have been present at the crucifixion. This is supported by Luke who tells us that Pilate assembled the chief priests, the rulers and the people (Lk 23:13) to try Jesus for claiming He was the Son of God and the king of the Jews. Jesus was then led out of Jerusalem where He would have passed many more people. Finally, He was crucified at Golgotha, a place that would have been visible from a considerable distance.

Both focal points serve as reminders of both the need for and the presence of God's atonement and forgiveness. The crude altar and the crude cross were in prominent locations and could be observed by many, even at a distance. In addition, both places were public. Being located in the courts, the altar of burnt offering was not restricted to the priests alone, but was open to everyone. As the place of atonement and forgiveness it

was important that its access not be limited to a select group of particular social or political status. We see this universal access exemplified in Christ's death on the cross. Christ died for all people, regardless of age, race, wealth, health, language or sin. Paul summarizes this well in his letter to the Corinthians:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Cor 5:14)

The rising plume of smoke from the burning offerings would have been visible day and night regardless of where any of the tribes of Israel were located in the camp. It was the priest's responsibility to keep the fire burning by removing the ashes and arranging new firewood on the altar every morning. Similarly, God's mercies and compassions are new every morning, for his faithfulness is great (Lam 3:22-23). The cloud of the glory of the Lord would have been continuously visible as well. The closing verse of Exodus states, "So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and the fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels" (Ex 40:38). The constant presence of this cloud and the smoke from the altar would have been a reminder to the people of the presence of God and of the offering continuously atoning for their sins before him. The Israelites had their eyes set on the smoke of sacrifice and the glory of the Lord, which one can observe paralleled as the writer of Hebrews exhorts, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (Heb 12:2). Living each moment cognizant of the mercy and grace afforded them through the blood of Jesus, Christians are to keep their eyes set on the ever-visible Jesus Christ.

The smoke of this burnt offering rose to the heavens, toward the one to whom it was offered. One would imagine the burning flesh of a slaughtered animal to smell horrible but we read otherwise. Three times in only nine verses the same phrase appears: "It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Lev 1:9,13,17). How could God possibly call such an odor "pleasing?" This odor is the sweet smell of obedience and offering. It is the smell of refinement marked by the burning off of impurities. Christ, who parallels this offering of the law, is described in a similar way. Paul supports this imagery writing, "...Just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2). He also thanks the people of Philippi for support gifts they sent to him claiming, "They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Php 4:18). God desires offering and sacrifice stemming from obedience. Jesus is this sacrifice through which sin is atoned for and is a fragrant offering, having perfectly and completely offered himself in submission to his father's will.

Moses' service was also such that it stemmed out of obedience. Several times in God's instructions to Moses for building the tabernacle he commands, "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Ex 25:40, 27:8, 31:11). It required obedience to make the tabernacle according to God's divine plans. In the final chapter of Exodus, significant emphasis is placed on Moses' obedience as he sets up the completed tabernacle and furniture. Seven of just thirteen verses describe something that Moses did which is then followed by, "...As the Lord commanded him."<sup>17</sup> A person can build an incredibly symbolic, ornate or beautiful tabernacle, temple or church but if God is not there it will remain dead. Something done out of personal ambition or sacrifice in

the absence of obedience is simply without true life. After Moses finishes the work of setting up and anointing the tabernacle and everything in it (40:9), the cloud covers it and the glory of the Lord fills the whole place (Ex 40:35). Moses' obedience was like a fragrant offering; an aroma pleasing to the Lord. For the glory of God to fill the tabernacle it was crucial that Moses be obedient. In the same way, we ought to listen to God and ask him and what he wants us to do rather than attempting to achieve his blessing by our own means.

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<sup>17</sup> Ex 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32.

# III

## Blood and Atonement

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Sacrifice in itself does not imply the presence of obedience, nor does obedience imply the presence of sacrifice. However, sacrifice occurring outside obedience is without power, but obedience in the absence of sacrifice retains power. The biblical basis for this is deep. David writes, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you do not despise" (Ps 51:16-17). Proverbs says, "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Pr 21:3). This is further echoed in 1 Samuel: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offering and sacrifices as much as obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (15:22). There were an overwhelming amount of sacrifice laws given to the Israelites, and from these preceding verses we can assume that offering was as much about obedience to the process as it was about the actual act.

We must be reminded that Jesus was first an offering and then a sacrifice. His motive for dying on the cross was not first to save a sinful world but to follow his father's will. Christ saved a sinful world *because* it was his father's will. He did not offer himself because he wanted to, but because God wanted him to. An example of this also lies in the practices surrounding the bread of the Presence. The table on which it sat was located inside the Holy Place against the right wall. The twelve loaves of bread (one for

each tribe) were to remain on the table as an offering to the Lord for six days and then were to be eaten and replaced by the priests each Sabbath (Lev 24:8-9). They served first as an offering to God and then as food for the priests. This thought is most clearly and eloquently described by A.B. Simpson:

Christ's work of salvation was as much an offering to God as a provision for man...There was a Father's heart deserving the love and obedience of a race He had created in His image...Christ came as man's answer to God as much as God's message to man...He looked past the men that had sinned and were sinning and saw only the one man that stood for them, and in Him He accepts all.<sup>18</sup>

### **Atonement Day**

Before his physical death Jesus had to die to his own will so that his father's will could be done in him. Prior to his arrest Jesus was filled with extraordinary sorrow and went with his disciples to pray at a place called Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed three times for his father to take away his sorrow and suffering. Each time he prayed he became more submitted to his father's will. He understood that the scriptures and the writing of the prophets must be fulfilled in him (Mt 26:36-46). This time at Gethsemane indicates the beginning of Jesus' separation from God. It would seem natural for a father (especially an omnipotent, omniscient and loving one) to protect his innocent child from suffering, sorrow, harm and death but this does not happen. Jesus knew his father's heart better than anyone else, but as he becomes a sacrifice the sin of the world must be transferred to him. To understand this better we turn to the atonement practices outlined in Leviticus.

*Gethsemane: sorrow and solitude*

The Day of Atonement in which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of all the Israelites took place once a year (Lev 16:34). This process was quite involved, including many important steps. One of these steps included taking two goats and presenting them at the entrance to the tent of meeting. One goat was to be slaughtered and the other was to be presented alive before the Lord and then sent into the desert as a “scapegoat” (Lev 16:10). Before this scapegoat was sent into the desert the sins of the Israelites had to be transferred to it. God gives instructions for this commanding, “[The high priest] is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head” (Lev 16:21). This is the very thing that was beginning to occur before Jesus went to Gethsemane. The sin of the world began to be transferred to Jesus as God gave him over to suffering and death, making his life a guilt and sin offering. The prophet Isaiah further foreshadows these events as he writes, “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6). Carrying the weight of the world’s sin and his resulting separation from God brought Christ the overwhelming sorrow that he experienced at Gethsemane.<sup>19</sup>

Leviticus elaborates on God’s instructions to Aaron stating, “He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed to the task. The goat will carry on it all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert” (Lev 16:21b-22). The garden of Gethsemane was located on the southwest of the city, outside the walls of Jerusalem. On Atonement Day the scapegoat that was made sin was taken to a solitary place and released. The same progression of events occurs in the gospel

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<sup>18</sup> Rev. A. B. Simpson Christ in the Tabernacle 92-94

accounts of the eve and day of Jesus' crucifixion. Merriam-Webster defines scapegoat as, "One who takes the blame for others." This was the role of Christ. As Jesus prayed alone in the garden, a place of solitude, he grappled in agony knowing that, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Scripture is fulfilled in that Jesus replaces the goat and Gethsemane replaces the solitary place.

### *The Scapegoat's Release*

After crying out in the garden Jesus calls his disciples to rise because he knows his time of betrayal is near (Mt 26:46). He is then arrested and goes before the Sanhedrin where he is questioned by the high priest and falsely accused by many. However, Jesus does not deny the charges against him (Mt 26:62-63) fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isa 53:7). Finally the high priest asks Jesus if he is the Son of God, which Jesus admits (Mt 26:64). He is then brought to Pilate, the man appointed as governor of Judea. Pilate immediately asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" and Jesus replies, "Yes, it is as you say" (Mt 27:11). On the Day of Atonement a goat was placed by Aaron, the high priest, in the care of a man appointed to the task. On the day of Jesus' crucifixion Caiaphas, the high priest, places Jesus in the care of Pilate, the man appointed to the task.

After Pilate finishes questioning Jesus he moves on to question the surrounding crowd, which by this time would have been a considerable gathering. According to

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<sup>19</sup> For evidence of the separation from God that results from sin see Hab 1:13, Isa 54:7-8, Dt 31:17, 2 Ch 30:17



Matthew, Mark and John it was customary on Passover for the governor to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd (Mt 27:15, Mk 15:6, Jn 18:39). According to this custom<sup>20</sup> Pilate gives the crowd the option of releasing Jesus or Barabbas, a notorious prisoner guilty with others of murder and uprising (Mt 27:17, Mk 15:7). The crowd shouts for the release of Barabbas and demands that Jesus be crucified. Pilate has little choice but to obey their demands and is forced to release Barabbas and hand Jesus over to be flogged and crucified. However, before handing him over Pilate washes his hands before the people and says, "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility!" (Mt 27:24). The people ironically respond, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Mt 27:21-22, 25-26). Just as the man appointed to the task on Atonement Day releases the scapegoat, the appointed Pilate releases Jesus to the people. Pilate's surrender of Jesus grants the people's plea for both his crucifixion and his blood. In his infinite mercy and grace Jesus' blood will be on the people and their children, forever covering and atoning for their sin.

After releasing the scapegoat according to the law the appointed man was commanded to bathe in water. Like this man, Pilate washes his hands after handing Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus serves as a scapegoat in the immediate sense as well as the eternal sense in this text. In the immediate sense Jesus takes Barabbas' place and in the eternal sense Jesus takes the place of all fallen humanity. Even those who may not have recognized Jesus as the one who was sent to permanently atone for the sins of humankind would likely have recognized his immediate function as a scapegoat for Barabbas.

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<sup>20</sup> According to the custom and partially as a way out, since it seems that Pilate believed Jesus and did not really want to crucify him.

Barabbas' name means "Son of Abba"<sup>21</sup> and he is representative of all humanity—the children of Abba for whom Jesus served as a scapegoat. Like this rebellious criminal we too deserve death but Jesus has taken our place on the cross, granting us freedom and life. As Paul instructs the Romans, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). We have been bought for a price. These wages have been paid because Jesus who had no sin was made sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

#### *Atonement and Asylum*

The scapegoat served as just one goat of a pair used on the Day of Atonement. One goat was to be given as a sin offering to God and another was to be used for making atonement, which further supports the aforementioned dual function of Jesus as both an offering to God and a provision for man. The goat given as a sin offering was to be slaughtered and its blood taken into the tabernacle. However, before this happened it was important that Aaron (as was the case at this particular time in history) offer a bull as a sin offering for himself and his household (Lev 16:6). Then he was to slaughter the other goat and do the same thing with its blood as he did with the bull's blood, which was to sprinkle it on and in front of the atonement cover. The blood that went in front of the atonement cover was to be sprinkled before it seven times by the high priest (16:14-15). He would then go out to the altar of incense in the Holy Place and put blood on the horns of the altar as well as sprinkling some on it seven times. After this atonement the bull and the goat whose blood was sprinkled must be taken outside the camp to be burned.

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<sup>21</sup> NIV Study Bible note Lk 23:18

Many parallels seen here have been discussed previously. Jesus' atonement blood was shed for the people and placed on the atonement cover, or mercy seat like that of the bull and goat. Additionally, like these two animals that were burned outside the camp, Jesus was taken outside the city walls to be crucified.<sup>22</sup> Beyond these things an important point not previously explained is the presence of the horns on the altar of incense and on the altar of burnt offering. These horns extend from the four corners of each of these structures and act as symbols of help and refuge throughout the Bible. In the book of Kings Adonijah puts his destiny in the hands of God as we read, "But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar" (1Ki 1:50).<sup>23</sup> A horn is also shown as a symbol of power, favor and protection. When destruction is mentioned throughout the Bible it is often described in conjunction with the cutting off of a horn or horns. The horn, a symbol of refuge and protection, when cut off indicates judgment over a place or person.

In Jeremiah there is a warning that Moab will be crushed and utterly destroyed, becoming the subject of divine judgment. He says, "Moab's horn is cut off; her arm is broken, declares the Lord" (48:25). We see evidence of this as Amos prophesies, "On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground" (Am 3:14). The horns in some instances were also a sign of strength and power while the altar as a whole served as a place of asylum. In Habbakkuk we read, "His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden (Hab 3:4). Interestingly, the word translated as ray here is

<sup>22</sup> Mk 15:22, Jn 19:17,20, Heb 13:12, Lev 16:27, 9:11, Nu 19:3, Eze 43:21

<sup>23</sup> Also 1 Ki 2:28 and, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Ps 18:2).

actually the Hebrew word (qeren)<sup>24</sup> that in most other places is translated "horn."<sup>25</sup> On atonement day and for sin offerings the rest of the year blood was placed on these horns to consecrate them to the Lord. Through this blood on the horns of the altar the people have strength, power and refuge.

These laws regulating Atonement Day practices seem mundane even in these paragraphs, but as we read them in light of and as light to later texts they spring to life. Why would it possibly be important that the blood of the sacrifices is sprinkled seven times? What is the purpose of regulation after regulation? These laws point to Christ and bear testimony to the character of God. Thank God that Christ's blood has covered us once and for all. Believers are no longer bound by copious amounts of stringent laws, but are in Christ allowed constant communion with the father. This father is gracious and compassionate. He is also God. Nothing should be worshipped or glorified over him. He demands obedience, holiness, purity, reverence and love. He made humankind in his image to reflect who he is and finally in his son Jesus Christ he saw his image reflecting perfectly back. And when he looks upon those who are in Christ he again sees the image of his perfect son reflecting back.

### **The Life is in the Blood**

The Israelites needed atonement because of their uncleanness and rebellion. In short, they were sinners. So are all of us. As Paul says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Rom 3:23). We all are in need of the

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<sup>24</sup> Strong's concordance

<sup>25</sup> Same as that of Ps 118:27, 1 Ki 2:28, Zecl:18-21, Dan 8:20 and more.

forgiveness that comes from faith in Christ Jesus. When God looks at us he sees Christ because we are covered by his blood and adopted as sons and daughters. There is great power and life in blood throughout the Bible. This blood of sacrifice goes beyond the small amount placed as atonement on the altar and its horns. As Hebrews claims, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22). With this a pattern emerges in the Bible as a whole of blood being associated with forgiveness and life.

Blood cleanses everything in the tabernacle, including the priests. This blood forgave the people allowing the priests especially to minister to God in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies without dying. At Passover it was again blood that shielded believers from harm. Believers were to slaughter a lamb at twilight, take its blood and place it over the door frames as protection against the plague of the firstborn (Ex 12:7, 12). The blood of the Passover, from a lamb without defect, preserved the lives of the people and was the final plague that set the Israelite captives free from their bondage in Egypt. This helped set the standard for the saving power of blood. The saving blood of Christ mediates for us today while its figurative presence serves as a sign of belief and life in Him.

Blood was also an integral part of sin offerings as separate from those occurring on Atonement Day. Sin offerings for the priest (whose sins fell on the whole community) and for the Israelite community were performed in a very similar manner. The blood a young slaughtered bull was taken into the Holy Place and sprinkled seven times before the Lord, in front of the curtain (Lev 4:6, 17).<sup>26</sup> This curtain is the curtain that separated

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<sup>26</sup> "Seven times also seen in Atonement Day texts and in Numbers 19:4

the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies and thus the presence and glory of God.

Therefore, the implication is that to get to God one had to go through the blood, as it stood between the Holy Place (representing earth) and the Holy of Holies (representing heaven). Christ too stands in the middle. Access to God must happen through the blood of Jesus who says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (Jn 14:6). This is further upheld in 1 Timothy which claims, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time" (2:5).

These New Testament texts make it very clear that Jesus is the sole way to God. This truth can certainly stand alone, but undoubtedly strengthened by its Old Testament parallel. The parallel of bloodshed between the sin offerings and the offering of Christ is perhaps the most exciting. Seven, the number of times the animal's blood was to be sprinkled before the curtain, is both a perfect number as well as the number of places that Jesus bled from. Counting the hands as only one place as well as the feet Jesus is reported to have bled from seven locations on his body in his last hours. These locations are his back (floggings)<sup>27</sup>, his head (crown of thorns)<sup>28</sup>, his hands, his feet (both from nails of the crucifixion)<sup>29</sup>, his side (that was pierced)<sup>30</sup>, his whole body (sweating blood at Gethsemane)<sup>31</sup> and his face (beard pulled out)<sup>32</sup>. Adding to its credibility and significance, the fact that Jesus bleeds from seven different places is not a report

<sup>27</sup> Mt 27:26; Mk 15:15; Lk 23:16, 22; Jn 19:1

<sup>28</sup> Mt 27:29; Mk 15:17; Jn 19:2, 5

<sup>29</sup> Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:18

<sup>30</sup> Jn 19:34, 37

<sup>31</sup> Lk 22:35 and NIV note: Sweat mixed with blood is a medical condition known as hematidrosis that can occur under extreme stress.

<sup>32</sup> Isa 50:6

restricted to one author but is shown through a combination of several, some with exclusive reports.

### *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*

The number and quality of similarities between the sacrifice laws and Christ's offering of himself point beyond a reasonable doubt to Jesus as the final intended as a sacrifice of atonement. Neither the daily or yearly atonement for sin is necessary because Jesus fulfilled the law, coming once and for all for the forgiveness of sin. Cleansing of sin and communion with God must happen through blood. The pouring out of the blood at both the altar and the cross was an important but relatively small part of the whole process. Observation of the stipulations for Israelite communion with God grants the Christian fresh understanding of the importance and perfection of Christ's sacrifice. Observing these parallels helps us to see how Christ was revealed in the tabernacle manifestation and sheds light on the foundation for Christ's sacrifice that God laid from the creation of the world.

## Conclusion

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This paper does not intend to claim that Jesus' life was unimportant. Jesus was an offering to God in life as well as in death. He presented his body as a living sacrifice to God. This life he lived to God was a perfect life, fulfilling God's desires for intimacy in his relationship with humankind. In his life Jesus sets both an example and a standard for how to live and in his death and resurrection he provides a means to do so. Jesus serves as the offering and sacrifice of atonement through which we are allowed to enter into God's presence. He was first an offering to his father and then a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. The parallels of his death to atonement practices and burnt sin offerings points to him as an appropriate and law-fulfilling sacrifice. This evidence points to Christ as the Messiah and fulfillment of the law. Through Christ we are free from the law of sin.

The earthly tabernacle changed in that it no longer exists as the physical dwelling place of God, but the existence of a heavenly tabernacle did not change. As Christians it is a goal to keep an eternal perspective and model Christ. We are his living dwelling place so all aspects of the tabernacle, these copies of heavenly things, should in the symbolic sense also be present in us. On earth these things, even in humankind, can never be perfect or take the exact form of the heavenly things. These copies were so important to God that he told Moses to make them "exactly as he was shown on the mountain" and put them in the place that would serve as the center of community and worship. Therefore, we are well served to study the copies in the OT tabernacle to understand the heavenly things.



The tabernacle and the things in it are what God has chosen to surround Himself with. The tabernacle was meant to convey something about God's character and his ways. As we have seen, this was achieved in the tabernacle. However, what better to convey something about and reveal God than by that which was created in his very image. We are living tabernacles. We are the living dwelling place of a perfect, loving, faithful and eternal God! We love Him because he first loved us and present our bodies as living sacrifices to an indwelling God. God chooses to manifest Himself on earth through many different things. The greatest of these things that He has given us is His Word – The Bible. The Bible reveals the nature, character and ways of God and if read in faith it can guide us by the Spirit to a greater knowledge of Him.

To make sense of perceived contradictions regarding Christ's crucifixion in the gospel texts some point to the social and political motives of the authors. From this perspective the parallels between Christ's death and God's laws for appropriate sacrifice<sup>33</sup> are viewed as little more than the authors' effort to interpret Christ as a sacrifice. However, the numbers and nature of present parallels make obvious the fact that Christ served both as an offering and a sacrifice. The facts pointing to this are not restricted to a single book; but are the efforts of several authors combined to make a single point, showing that Christ's sacrificial identity is not the work of a single author seeking to interpret according to personal motives. Due to the many parallels and the diversity in the origin of these parallels it is not a responsible or likely conclusion to claim that the New Testament authors were reinterpreting Christ as a sacrifice. The identity of Christ as a sacrifice can stand alone, without the need for a delicate presentation of the events surrounding his life and death. It is evident that New

Testament authors point to Christ's sacrifice, but only because they recognized it as such and in the process encountered its power.

These claims of reinterpretation can be quite dangerous. In them one is left with more contradictions than he or she was attempting to avoid by the reinterpretation theory in the first place. To claim that the New Testament authors are writing to fit their own political or social agenda by reinterpreting Christ's death as a sacrifice challenges the very intricacy and divinity that defines the Bible. A woman at a conference once asked the question, "How thin is your Bible?" This is a good question for all of us. What have we thrown out of the Bible because it doesn't fit our logic or our needs? We sometimes try so hard to explain with logic that which can only be explain by faith. By definition a supernatural, divine Creator God cannot always be defended in terms of logic or rationality. Christ came asa man to live a life of example

We read that sacrifices on atonement day must be burned outside of the city walls and that blood must be shed, sprinkled, placed on things and poured out. These laws and others parallel the death of Christ in a particular way. Is this because they really happened this way or because the authors of the gospels interpreted them to show Christ as a sacrifice? If these authors reinterpreted aspects of Old Testament sacrifice law what did they choose to reinterpret? The events portrayed in the gospels had to happen the way they are written for Jesus to legitimately be seen as an acceptable replacement for Old Testament cultic sacrifice.

A major part of Old Testament sacrifice law was that the offering/sacrifice that atoned for a sin of the whole congregation was to be, "a young male without defect."

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<sup>33</sup> The terms sacrifice and offering are used interchangeably throughout these paragraphs.

Biblically, to serve as an acceptable sacrifice and atone for the sins of all people Jesus must be perfect or "unblemished." Peter elaborates on this connection exhorting:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Pe 1:18-19)

Christ was without blemish or defect, being holy, righteous and pure. The center of Christian theology and faith hangs on this very truth (2 Cor 5:21, 1 Pe 2:22, Isa 53:9, 1 Jn 3:5). With the reinterpretation perspective one is left too close to being able to claim that Jesus was a sinner; and a Jesus with sin could not be the Messiah. For many believers this will not happen, but the questionable nature of this perspective does not lie in those things that are selected as reinterpreted. The problem is the concept of reinterpretation being proposed as an acceptable and responsible process of interpretation. Nothing dangerous may happen in our own hands, but when given to others this process is dangerous.

Arguing that the gospel writers take what really happened in Jesus' life and death and simply highlight certain parts that point to him as a sacrifice is a responsible assessment. This claim does not tread on dangerous ground like the claim of reinterpretation, which declares that the events didn't necessarily happen as they were written. If an author with the intention of pointing to Jesus as a sacrifice inauthentically writes that Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem's walls and that his blood poured from his side, what is to say that his motives for a sinless Jesus were not the same? Claiming that any one aspect of the sacrifice of Christ is interpreted in a way different than reality

is to risk the credibility and integrity of all that is recorded, ultimately questioning the very foundation of the Christian faith.