

# Sacrifices



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Gen. 3:9–21; Exod. 12:21–27; Lev. 2:1–3; Gen. 22:1–19; Lev. 17:10, 11; Phil. 4:18.*

**Memory Text:** “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (*Romans 12:1, NASB*).

Central to the entire gospel is the concept of sacrifice. In the biblical languages, the words for “sacrifice” often depict the idea of drawing near and of bringing something to God. The basic meaning of the Hebrew for *offering* or *sacrifice* describes the act of approaching, the act of bringing something into the presence of God. The Greek equivalent means “gift” and describes the presentation of a sacrifice.

Similarly, the English word *offering* comes from the Latin *offerre*, the presentation of a gift. The word *sacrifice* is a combination of the Latin *sacer* (holy) and *facere* (make) and refers to the act of making something sacred.

This week we will look at some of the sacrifices that believers have offered to God. We will discover that God has always been calling for sacrifices, and He is still doing so today.

Of course, and most important, God provided the ultimate sacrifice, that of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 19.*

## The First Sacrifice

**Read** Genesis 3:9–21. What was God’s response to Adam and Eve after they sinned?

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Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world, in a sanctuary-like garden, and God granted them face-to-face communion with their Creator. Their first sin opened a nearly insurmountable breach in their relationship to God. However, God had already planned how to counter such a breach of trust, and even before there came any judgment against them, He gave them the hope of a Savior (*Gen. 3:15*).

“Adam and Eve stood as criminals before their God, awaiting the sentence which transgression had incurred. But before they hear of the thorn and the thistle, the sorrow and anguish which should be their portion, and the dust to which they should return, they listen to words which must have inspired them with hope. Though they must suffer . . . , they might look forward to ultimate victory.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 16.

The Lord showed them the ultimate foundation of that victory when, immediately after His judgment speech, He made for them garments of skin to cover their nakedness and shame. Although unstated, it may be reasonable to assume that an innocent animal had to die for this, and perhaps even that it was understood as a kind of sacrifice (*Gen. 3:21*).

God’s provision of clothes for the culprits became a symbolic act. Just as the sacrifices in the desert sanctuary guaranteed the special relationship between God and His people, so the clothing in the Garden assured the guilty of God’s unchanging goodwill toward them.

So, from the earliest days of human history, sacrifices taught that sinful humans could find union with God, but only through the death of Jesus, who was prefigured in those sacrifices.

**Reread Genesis 3:9–21. What does it say to you that even before God spoke any words of judgment to the guilty pair He gave them the promise of “ultimate victory”? What does this say about God’s attitude toward us, even in our fallen state?**

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## Types of Offerings

In Old Testament times, believers could bring offerings on different occasions and in different personal circumstances. Different objects they were allowed to “offer” included clean animals, grain, or drink, as well as other things. The animal sacrifice is the oldest element in the sanctuary service and, together with the priestly service, belongs at the center of the Israelite service. Religious life without sacrifice was inconceivable.

**Which** kinds of offerings are described in the following texts? *Exod. 12:21–27, Lev. 2:1–3, Exod. 25:2–7, Lev. 4:27–31.*

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God established the sacrificial system so that believers could enter into a close relationship with Him. This is why offerings could be brought in all different kinds of situations: for thanksgiving, for an expression of joy and celebration, for a gift, for a petition for forgiveness, for a penitential plea, for a symbol of dedication, or for restitution.

Among the most important types of offerings were the burnt offering (*Leviticus 1*) and the grain offering (*Leviticus 2*), as well as the peace, or well-being, offering (*Leviticus 3*), the purification offering (*Leviticus 4*), and the reparation (trespass) offering (*Lev. 5:14–6:7*). The first three were voluntary offerings, which were to remind the giver (and us) that, in the end, everything that we are and all that we have belong to God. The burnt offering symbolizes the total dedication of the one making the offering. The grain offering symbolizes the dedication of our material possessions to God, whether they be food, animals, or something else. The well-being offering is the only sacrifice in which the participant receives a part of the offering for personal consumption.

The other two sacrifices were obligatory. They reminded the people that, though wrongs have consequences, those wrongs can be “healed.” The purification offering, often called “sin offering,” was offered after ritual defilement or after the person became aware of a moral defilement through sin.

**The widespread function of the offerings shows that every aspect of our lives must come under God’s control. How can you learn to surrender completely everything you have, or are, to Him? What happens when you don’t do this?**

## Sacrifice at Moriah

**Read** Genesis 22:1–19. What did Abraham learn about sacrifice?

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What was God’s purpose in this incredible challenge to Abraham’s faith? The patriarch’s life with God had always been accompanied by divine promises: the promise of land, of descendants, and of blessings; the promise of a son; and the promise that God would take care of Ishmael. Abraham sacrificed, but it was always in the light of some promise. However, in the situation described in Genesis 22, Abraham did not get any divine promise; instead, he was told to sacrifice the living promise, his son. Following through on God’s command, Abraham showed that God was more important to him than anything else.

“It was to impress Abraham’s mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man’s redemption. No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

Concerning the sacrifice, Abraham understood two essential principles. First, no one but God Himself can bring the true sacrifice and the means of salvation. It is the Lord who will, who must, provide. Abraham eternalizes this principle by naming the place “YHWH Jireh,” which means “The-LORD-Will-Provide.” Second, the actual sacrifice is substitutional, one that saves Isaac’s life. The ram is offered “in the place of” Isaac (*Gen. 22:13, NASB*). That animal, which God provided, prefigures the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, on whom “the LORD has laid . . . the iniquity of us all” (*Isa. 53:6, 7; Acts 8:32, NKJV*).

**What an astonishing surrender to God! Who can imagine what that experience must have been like for Abraham? Think about the last time that you had to reach out in sheer faith and do something that caused you a lot of anguish. What did you learn from your actions, and how well has the lesson stuck?**

## Life for a Life

**Read** Leviticus 17:10, 11. What function does God give to the blood?

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In a passage where God instructs the Israelites not to eat any blood, He provides an interesting reason for this prohibition: blood stands for life, and God has made sacrificial blood a ransom for human life. One life, represented by the blood, ransoms another life. The principle of substitution, which became explicit on Mount Moriah when Abraham offered the blood of the ram in the place of the blood of his son, is firmly anchored in God's legal requirements for ancient Israel.

As in Genesis 22, God shows that it is He Himself who provides the means for atonement; in the Hebrew, the *I* in “ ‘ ‘I have given it to you’ ’ ” (*Lev. 17:11, NKJV*) is emphasized. We cannot provide our own ransom. God must give it.

The concept is different from that of other religions that use sacrifices. In the Bible, it is not a human who approaches God and knows how to appease Him; it is God, rather, who provides the means for a person to come into His holy presence. And in Christ, He Himself provides the blood for ransom.

**Read** 1 Samuel 15:22 and Micah 6:6–8. What are some of the dangers of the ritual system?

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God never intended the sacrificial service to be a substitute for the attitude of the heart; on the contrary, the sacrifices were to open the heart of the believer to the Lord. If we lose sight of the fact that sacrifices express a spiritual relationship between God and us and that they all point to a much greater sacrifice, Jesus Christ, we could easily mistake the sacrificial ritual for an automatic apparatus for making atonement. Besides sacrifice, God really wants our hearts to be right with Him (*Ps. 51:16, 17*). Consistently the Israelite prophets accused the people of false piety and called for them “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (*Mic. 6:6–8, NRSV; compare Isa. 1:10–17*).

**In what ways do we face the same danger as expressed above? Why is it often so hard to realize that we could be doing exactly what the ancient Israelites did in this area? How can we avoid this mistake?**

## Sacrifices Today/Living Sacrifice

Though after Christ’s sacrificial death there was no more need for animal sacrifices, the New Testament does talk about the need for another kind of sacrifice instead.

**According** to these texts, what kind of offerings are we to bring to God today? *Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15, 16; 1 Pet. 2:5.*

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Terminology from the sacrificial system worked very well in describing the early Christian concept of what it meant to live a life totally consecrated to God. In fact, even when Paul was thinking about his martyrdom, he described himself as a drink offering (*Phil. 2:17, 2 Tim. 4:6*).

**What** specific message is given to us in Romans 12:1? In what ways are we to manifest this truth in our own lives?

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A “living sacrifice” means that the entire person is given to God. It includes the dedication of the body (*Rom. 12:1*) as well as the transformation of the inner being (*vs. 2*). We are to be set apart (“holy”) for the sole purpose of serving the Lord. Christians will present themselves wholly to the Lord because of the “mercies of God,” as described in Romans 12:1–11, which presents Christ as our Sacrifice, the means of our salvation.

In this context, Paul’s appeal is for Christians to imitate Christ. A true understanding of God’s grace leads to a life consecrated to God and to a loving service for others. Surrender of self and the desires of self to the will of God is the only reasonable response to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice for us.

In the end, there has to be a harmony between our understanding of spiritual and doctrinal truth and our service to others. Every aspect of life should express the believer’s genuine commitment to God. True worship is never only inward and spiritual; it must encompass outward acts of selfless service. After all, think about what our Lord has done for us.

**Further Study:** “It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac’s question, ‘Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ Abraham made answer, ‘God will provide Himself a lamb;’ and when the father’s hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man’s salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 155.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ “Our feet will walk in his paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues will bring healing, our hands will lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending; our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.”—John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), p. 322. In what ways does this quote show what it means to be a “living sacrifice”? Why is it that only through death to self could we ever be able to live like this?
- ❷ As we saw during the week’s lesson, one of the great problems that the people faced was seeing the sacrificial system as an end in itself instead of a means to an end—that end being a life wholly consecrated to God, a consecration that reveals itself in loving service to others. In what ways are Seventh-day Adventists (who have been given so much light) especially in danger of going down the same path, because perhaps we now think that the great truths we possess are an end in and of themselves, instead of a means to the end?
- ❸ Dwell more on the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. However troubling this story is, one could argue that it was meant to be troubling, to cause consternation and distress. Why do you think anyone would argue that it was meant, among other things, to evoke those emotions in the reader?

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 22:1–19*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the significance of the Old Testament sacrificial system.

**Feel:** Sense from the Old Testament sacrifices the awful nature of sin and the terrible cost of our salvation.

**Do:** Determine to contemplate regularly the fulfillment of the sacrificial system in Christ the “Lamb of God.”

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: The Old Testament Sacrificial System

**A** The sacrificial system was introduced by God after the Fall (*Gen. 3:15, 21*). How does the first gospel promise (*Gen. 3:15*) imply the substitutionary atonement of the Messiah?

**B** The meaning of the sacrificial system was grasped by Abraham, especially through his experience on Mount Moriah. What features of Genesis 22 reveal the love of the Father in not withholding His only Son from dying for us?

**C** The Passover service (*Exodus 12*) provides one of the most comprehensive prefigurations of the sacrifice of Christ. What basic elements of His sacrifice are foreshadowed in this service?

### II. Feel: The Awfulness of Sin and the High Cost of Atonement Portrayed in the Animal Sacrifices

**A** How can visualizing the Old Testament sacrifices help us to better appreciate the heinousness of sin and the infinite cost of Christ’s atoning death?

### III. Do: Contemplating Christ in the Shadows

**A** Resolve to spend quality time this next week contemplating the atoning work of Christ as prefigured in the Old Testament sacrificial system.

► **Summary:** The Old Testament sacrificial system provides a powerful portrait of the many-faceted meaning of Christ’s sacrificial death on Calvary.



## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *John 1:29*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The Old Testament sacrificial system provided a portrait in advance of the profound meaning of the sacrifice of Christ. It also typified the experience of Christians in offering themselves as a “living sacrifice” (*Rom. 12:1, NKJV*).

**Just for Teachers:** A seminary professor tells the experience of when she reluctantly accompanied her husband through the conflict-torn region of the Holy Land to the top of Mount Gerazim at Passover time. Here, the few surviving Samaritans on earth still sacrifice Passover lambs. As the lambs were led to the slaughter, she averted her eyes. But at the last minute, she looked. How utterly awful their deaths were. As she beheld the innocent creatures struggling against the knife, her soul revolted against the callousness of the priest, who was offering the sacrifice. But even more, she found revolting the whole idea of the sacrificial system. Why did innocent animals have to die to point forward to the death of Jesus? On the way back that night, in the light of the full Passover moon, she poured out her bitterness against God for the awfulness of the animal sacrifices until suddenly light from heaven penetrated her darkened mind. She finally began to understand the point: sin is so awful that it cost the life of the innocent Lamb of God. This Sacrifice was the only way that God could get people with their hardened human hearts to see how terrible sin was, how costly our salvation is.

**Opening Activity:** Share the seminary professor’s story, asking for class responses to the sacrificial system.

**Consider This:** Some Christians teach that God did not actually create the sacrificial system but simply condescended to use a pagan concept to reach His people where they were. Why does the Bible not support this view?

### ► **STEP 2**—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** This week we will examine the sacrificial system as introduced to Adam and Eve, as practiced in the patriarchal period, and as amplified in the laws of Moses. We will explore this system’s typological significance for understanding the heart of the gospel.

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Sacrificial System Introduced in Eden *(Review Genesis 3:9–21 with your class.)*

In the first gospel promise, found in Genesis 3:15, the substitutionary sacrifice of the Messianic Seed is already powerfully portrayed. Visualize it: the Seed, Christ, takes off His sandal, as it were, bares His heel, and steps voluntarily on a venomous viper. It is a picture of the Seed voluntarily giving up His life to slay the serpent. Christ volunteered to consciously step on the head of the most deadly viper in the universe, the serpent Satan himself, knowing full well that it would cost Him His life.

Genesis 3:21 indicates that God clothed Adam and Eve with skins—implying the sacrifice of animals. How do we know that this clothing refers to more than just covering their physical nakedness in order to keep them warm from the chilled, post-Fall atmosphere? We know because the text makes it clear that their nakedness after the Fall was more than physical nudity. After they had covered themselves with fig leaves, Adam confessed to God that he was still naked (*vs. 10*). Thus, the nakedness included a nakedness of soul—i.e., guilt, which needed to be covered by more than physical garments. Instead of the fig leaves of their own works with which they unsuccessfully tried to cover their nakedness, God covered them with the robes of a Substitute. Instead of their blood, the blood of an innocent victim was shed (in parallel with the sin offering of Leviticus 4:29, the human sinners probably slaughtered the sacrificial animal themselves). Here is intimated the Messiah's substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of humanity. God Himself instituted and instructed Adam and Eve concerning the sacrificial system.

**Consider This:** Ellen G. White writes: “The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, ‘Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man’s place. He shall have another chance.’ ”—Ellen White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1085. Why is the substitutionary aspect of Christ’s sacrifice so important in our salvation?

### II. Abraham and the Sacrificial System *(Review Genesis 22:1–19 with your class.)*

The narrative of Genesis 22 describes the divine test of Abraham in which God asks him to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. This test may be the very apex of Old Testament gospel prefigurations, revealing in advance how both the Father and Son were to be involved in the anguish of the atoning sacrifice. Jesus remarked that “ ‘Abraham rejoiced to see

My day, and he saw it and was glad' ” (*John 8:56, NKJV*).

When did Abraham see Jesus' day? The apostle Paul quotes from Genesis 22 (*vs. 18*) and specifically points out that Scripture “announced the gospel in advance to Abraham” (*Gal. 3:8, NIV*). In the Hebrew of Genesis 22:17, 18, as in Genesis 3:15, the word for “seed” (*zera* ‘) first is used in a collective sense to refer to numerous descendants and then narrows to a singular meaning (marked by singular pronouns, although some modern translations do not show this) to focus on the one Messianic Seed in whom “ ‘all the nations of the earth shall be blessed’ ” (*Gen. 22:18, NKJV*). The experience of Isaac on Mount Moriah is thus explicitly linked to the sacrifice of the coming Messiah. Paul also points to the sacrificial spirit of the Father, who “did not spare [withhold] His own Son” (*Rom. 8:32, NKJV*), using the same language as God had twice used of Abraham on Mount Moriah (*Gen. 22:12, 16*).

**Consider This:** How does Genesis 22 and the related narrative of Abraham’s sacrifice in Genesis 15 (*see especially verses 6–18*) help us to better understand the gospel of justification by faith?

### III. The Levitical Sacrificial System: The Passover (*Review Exodus 12:21–27 with your class.*)

Among the many sacrifices in the Levitical system, perhaps none provides such a comprehensive, advance presentation of the sacrifice of Christ as the multifaceted Passover service. Ponder the following points:

1. Foundational significance: Passover marks the “beginning of months” (*Exod. 12:2*).
2. Focus on the lamb (a symbol of Jesus) (*Exod. 12:3, John 1:29*).
3. Perfect timing (*Exod. 12:5, John 13:1, 18:28, 19:14*): Jesus died at 3:00 P.M. on the fourteenth day of Nisan, just as the first Passover lambs were to be slain.
4. A perfect, complete sacrifice (*Exod. 12:5, 46; 1 Pet. 1:19; John 19:33, 36*).
5. An ample, all-inclusive sacrifice (*Exod. 12:4; John 3:16; Romans 3:23, 24; 5:6, 8, 18; 1 Tim. 4:10*).
6. Personal appropriation of the sacrifice (*Exod. 12:7, 8; John 6:53; 1 John 1:7, 9*).
7. Propitiatory, substitutionary sacrifice. The lamb was to be “roasted in fire” (*Exod. 12:8, NKJV*). The fires of divine wrath were poured out upon Jesus, as He took upon Himself the sins of the world and received the punishment we deserved.

The word *Passover* in Hebrew encapsulates the term by which the feast is named. “Passover” in Hebrew is *pesach*, which means “to pass or spring over.” God announced to Moses, “And when I see the blood, I will pass over [*pasach*] you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (*Exod. 12:13, NKJV; compare vs. 23*). Here is a

prefiguration of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus.

**Consider This:** The sacrifice of the coming Messiah runs like a “red thread” throughout the Old Testament. Cite other passages setting forth this foundational theme of the gospel.

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Seek to assist the class to see the awfulness of taking an innocent animal’s life—the gruesome sight of animal slaughter, the stench of blood and burning carcasses—in order to better appreciate the cost of Christ’s death for our sin.

#### Thought Question:

Will sacrifices still be offered even after sin and sinners are no more? Discuss. (See *Heb. 13:15* for a hint.)

#### Application Questions:

- 1 How may we personally “apply the merits of Christ’s blood . . . to the soul”?—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 277.
- 2 What does Paul mean by urging us to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (*Rom. 12:1, ESV*)?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** In the familiar passage of Ellen G. White, which we quoted last week—“it would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 83)—she concludes the paragraph: “As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit.”

**Activity:** Decide to spend thoughtful hours this next week focusing on the sacrifice of Christ, especially as prefigured in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Report the following week on the effect that this contemplation has had on your level of confidence in, and love for, Him and reception of His Spirit.