

bishops and presbyters are preachers of the word of God (Acts 20:28–32) and celebrants of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23–25).

**7. Anointing of the Sick.** The sacrament of healing, sometimes in preparation for death. This sacrament stems from Christ's own healing ministry, which is handed on to his apostles (Mark 6:13). Its administration involves an anointing in the name of the Lord, the prayers of the Church's presbyters, commending the sick to God, and sometimes the confession and remission of sins (Jas 5:14–15).

**SACRIFICE** A ritual action of worship that is near-universally attested in ancient religions. So ubiquitous is sacrifice to the history of human culture that Christian theology considers it a precept of the natural law (e.g., Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II–II, q.85, a.1). Biblical religion is dominated by the practice of sacrifice in many and varied forms. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, sacrifice is one of the principal means of ratifying, renewing, and repairing the relational bond between God and his people.

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#### I. THE PRACTICE OF SACRIFICE

Sacrifice has taken different forms at different times throughout the long centuries of biblical history. Distinctions in how it was practiced can be made between patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian times. The first two phases are considered below, and the third is examined in part III.

##### A. *Patriarchal Times*

As witnessed in the book of Genesis, prayer and sacrifice are the signature forms of religious expression in patriarchal times. Prayer is usually described with the idiom "to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26; 12:8; 21:33; 26:25). Sacrifice is described in a number of ways. Building altars, for example, implies the ritual offering of gifts to God (Gen 12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 35:7). Objects of sacrifice include flock animals such as sheep and goats (Gen 4:4; 22:13), birds (Gen 8:20), crops of the field (Gen 4:3), libations of wine or oil (Gen 28:18; 35:14), and, in one instance, bread and wine (Gen 14:18).

Sacrifice during patriarchal times was a discretionary practice. That is, Genesis gives no indication that the patriarchs followed a religious calendar of feast days (though the agricultural seasons likely played a part in the timing), that they observed a canon of liturgical procedures, or that they felt compelled to worship within the precincts of a religious sanctuary. Matters of when, how, and where sacrifice should be offered were left to the discretion of the worshipper. Not only that, but all public actions of sacrifice were performed by



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the head of the family—the patriarch himself—instead of a clerical priest or cultic functionary set apart for this task. Patriarchal religion was thus a form of natural family religion that was quite distinct from the sacrificial cult instituted by Moses and seen throughout most of the OT writings.

### *B. Mosaic Times*

Sacrifice became highly formalized and standardized in the Mosaic period. No longer a discretionary response to the natural law, it was now given precise definition in God's revealed Law to Israel. As part of the Sinai covenant, sacrifice came under extensive regulations that defined its many forms, objects, and procedures. So, too, the times and ministers of sacrifice were no longer entrusted to fathers and patriarchs in relation to the individual needs of their families, but were regulated by an annual calendar of religious feasts (Lev 23:4–44) and its attendant duties restricted to hereditary priesthood descended from Aaron and his sons (Exod 40:12–15). Sacrificial worship also came to be centered in a national sanctuary at this time—first in the Mosaic Tabernacle (Lev 17:1–7) and later in the Solomonic Temple (Deut 12:1–11).

The objects of Israelite sacrifice were heads of domestic livestock (cattle, sheep, goats) and a few species of birds (turtledoves, pigeons)—that is, only those animals that the Law declared “clean” and permissible to eat (Lev 11:1–47; Deut 14:3–21). Unclean animals, which included mainly wild animals, were never placed on the altar of worship. Among food offerings, sacrifices were made of wheat, barley, oil, and wine, with grain offerings being sprin-

kled with salt (Lev 2:13). Spices such as frankincense were also offered as an expression of worship (Exod 30:7–8).

Most of the Torah's sacrificial procedures are defined in Lev 1–7. In these chapters, a basic description is given of the five main types of sacrifice offered in biblical Israel. All such offerings were to be made at the central sanctuary, though each type had distinct liturgical rubrics for the officiating priest, the lay worshipper, and the gift to be offered.

1. *The Burnt Offering* (Hebrew *‘ôlâ*). The holocaust or ascending sacrifice outlined in Lev 1:3–7 and 6:8–13. In this sacrifice, the animal was drained of its blood, which was splashed against the sides of the altar, and then stripped of its hide, which was given to the officiating priest. The carcass was then cleaved into pieces and laid upon the fires of the altar hearth, from which point it ascended to God in the form of smoke and a savory scent. Because no part of the animal reverted to the worshipper, the burnt offering was considered the supreme oblation—a pure gift to the Lord. Its effect was atonement for sin (Lev 1:4; cf. Job 1:5). Holocausts could be voluntarily offered, though they were mandated for Israel's yearly festivals and for the twice-daily liturgy of the sanctuary (Exod 29:38–42).

2. *The Cereal Offering* (Hebrew *minhâ*). The grain offering outlined in Lev 2:1–16 and 6:14–23. In this sacrifice, milled wheat or barley was mixed or spread with oil and brought to the sanctuary priest; it could be unbaked, baked, griddled, or otherwise cooked. The priest would throw a handful of the offering upon the fires of the altar as a memorial portion



to the Lord, while the rest he took as consecrated food to be eaten by the Aaronic priests. It seems that the cereal offering was conceived as a form of "tribute" to the Lord, for the Hebrew name given to this sacrifice is elsewhere used in Scripture for a gift or payment that a subject people renders to its overlord (e.g., Judg 3:15; 2 Sam 8:2). Evidence suggests that the bloodless cereal offering was not an independent form of sacrifice; rather, it appears as an auxiliary sacrifice that was meant to accompany various animal offerings.

3. *The Peace Offering* (Hebrew *šĕlāmîm*). Also called the fellowship or communion offering, which is outlined in Lev 3:1–17 and 7:11–36. In this sacrifice, a flock or herd animal was brought to the sanctuary and divided into several parts: the blood was collected and splashed on the sides of the altar, the fat portions and kidneys were placed on the fires of the altar, the breast and right thigh of the victim were given to the priests as consecrated food, and the rest of the sacrificial meat reverted to the worshipper and his family to be eaten as a communion portion. In general, the peace offering was conceived as a celebratory banquet shared with the Lord and intended to deepen that relationship. Presumably it was thought to reinforce the bond of fellowship and peace between God and his people, for scholars generally agree that the name given to this sacrifice is related to the Hebrew word *šālôm*, meaning "peace" or "well-being." Subtypes of the peace offering included the thank offering (*tôdâ*), the spontaneous free-will offering (*nĕdābâ*), and the votive offering given in payment for a vow (*neder*).

4. *The Sin Offering* (Hebrew *ḥaṭṭā't*). The purification offering outlined in Lev 4:1–5:13 and 6:24–30. In this sacrifice, the animal offering is graded according to the person or persons in need of purification, whether a priest (bull), the whole congregation (bull), a ruler (male goat), or a layperson (female goat, lamb, turtledove, or pigeons). The fat portions and kidneys of the animal belonged to the Lord and were offered on the altar hearth; a meat portion was given to the priests as consecrated food; and the rest of the carcass was removed from the sanctuary and burned outside the camp. Central to the sin offering was the blood of the animal, which was conceived as a cleansing agent and was manipulated by the priest in a variety of ways (splashed, smeared, and sprinkled). The rite conferred forgiveness upon individuals (Lev 4:20, 26, 31), though many scholars contend that its primary purpose was the removal of ritual impurity from Israel and its sanctuary. Thus, in this context, sin is understood not only as a moral fault with its attendant guilt but also as a cultic transgression against the ceremonial laws of purity expressed in the Torah. Situations calling for purification included, among other things, childbirth (Lev 12:6), leprosy (Lev 14:19), and bodily emissions (Lev 15:1–33).

5. *The Guilt Offering* (Hebrew *'āšām*). The reparation offering outlined in Lev 5:14–6:7 and 7:1–7. In this sacrifice, an unblemished ram was brought to the sanctuary, its blood dashed against the sides of the altar, its kidneys and fat portions burned on the altar, and its meat given to the officiating priest as consecrated food. Besides this, the worship-



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per confessed his sin to the priest and paid a 20 percent reparation fee to the sanctuary. The purpose of the guilt offering was to deal with the profanation of holy things as well as the unjust appropriation of personal property. Transgressions in this category included sins of omission as well as sins discovered some time after their commission.

On the one hand, these main types of sacrifice, along with auxiliary forms such as the drink offering (e.g., Num 15:5, 10), were occasional sacrifices offered as circumstances demanded in the life of the nation. Most, however, were mandated as part of the festival celebrations of Israel's liturgical calendar. An inventory of the sacrifices offered daily in the sanctuary, weekly on the Sabbath, and yearly during the annual festival times is given in Num 28–29.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF SACRIFICE

### A. *Sacrifice and Representation*

Sacrifice has many dimensions and levels of meaning in the Bible. In general, sacrifices are symbolic actions. They are liturgical rites that give outward and public expression to man's innermost acts of devotion toward God. By means of sacrifice, man recognizes his total dependence upon God and acknowledges the supreme authority of God over his life. The relation between the offerer and his offering is best understood in terms of "representation." In other words, the gifts that man surrenders to God on the altar and sends into heaven as smoke represent the worshipper offering himself to God. Some interpret this distinction between the worshipper and his gift

in terms of "substitution," so that the animal is slain *in place of* or *instead of* the person making the sacrifice. There is some truth in this notion, insofar as the priest and victim were always distinct in the OT period; nevertheless, it is reductionistic as an overall theory of sacrificial symbolism. More probable is the representation theory that sees the worshipper sacrificing his belongings *on behalf of* himself or others. After all, God had no real need of animal flesh or other foods (Ps 50:12–13); what he really wants is our lives and hearts in the form of obedience, thanksgiving, and repentance (1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:16–17, 107:22). This is what the sacrifices of OT times make visible in a symbolic way.

### B. *Sacrifice and Covenant*

The importance of sacrifice in the Bible goes together with the importance of the covenant theme that runs throughout Scripture. Indeed, covenants are often ratified and renewed by liturgical actions of sacrifice (Ps 50:5). The reasons for this are fairly clear. On the one hand, covenants in Israel as well as the wider Near East were sacred alliances, not mere political or commercial transactions. That is, covenants were made in the presence of God (or the gods) and its partners invoked God as a witness of the pledges sworn by oath and as a guarantor of the sanctions to be meted out to those who proved to be faithful and unfaithful (blessings and curses). At one level, then, sacrifice helped to sanctify and solemnize an event where human commitments were made in the name of God, in the presence of God, and in reliance upon God.

Still, the sacredness of the event only par-



tially explains why sacrifice played a central role in the covenant ceremonies. To give a more complete account, one must consider the symbolism of the sacrifices themselves; for the blood that is shed in the ritual of ratification symbolizes both the blessings and the curses that are invoked upon the covenant partners. On the positive side, the lifeblood released from the animal victim symbolized the new relationship that bound the two parties together. In Israel and throughout the ancient Near East, covenants extended the rights and duties of "kinship" to persons genealogically unrelated. By slaying the victim and applying its blood to both of the pledging partners, the point was made that a new blood-relationship was being created. Thereafter, persons in covenant were not simply parties to a contract; they were now equivalent to family members on a legal and relational level of brothers and kinsmen. On the negative side, the ritual slaughter of animals symbolized the curse of death that the covenant threatened to impose on any partner who dared to violate its stipulations. Scholarship calls this a conditional self-curse or self-maledictory pledge. That is, in the act of swearing loyalty to each other, the covenant partners placed themselves under a curse sanction that was set to trigger on anyone who proved disloyal. The substance of this pledge is made visible in the sacrificial rite: if either partner chooses to break the covenant, he can expect to become like the animal victim that is slain and destroyed on the altar.

The ratification of the Sinai covenant in Exod 24 furnishes a clear example of this. Here the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was sealed by a sacrificial ceremony at the base of the

mountain. Animals were slain, and their blood was collected in bowls. Then came the ritual enactment of the covenant: half of the blood was splashed upon the people, and the other half was splashed on the altar, representing the Lord (Exod 24:4-8). This first of all signified the blessing that Yahweh was becoming the divine Kinsman of Israel, the Father and Protector of Israel, who was declared his first-born son (Exod 4:22). At the same time, both God and the people were pledging their fidelity to the covenant under the pain of curse sanctions. These were tangibly presented by the slaughter of the animals, the shedding of their blood, and the application of that blood to the pledging partners.

### C. Sacrifice and Idolatry

In addition to these functions and levels of symbolism, the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law call for special comment as to their intended purpose. For a new dimension of meaning unfolds at the time of the Exodus that relates sacrifice to the problem of idolatry. Narrative analysis of the Pentateuch indicates that the Levitical code of sacrifice was not part of the original covenant sealed at Mount Sinai; rather, it was added as a legal amendment to the Sinai covenant after the golden-calf apostasy of Israel (Exod 32:1-6). In other words, sacrifice became part of the Sinai covenant only in its renewed form after its original form was broken. Consider the story line: When Israel stood ready to make its Exodus journey out of Egypt, the Lord commanded the people to conduct a festival of sacrifice at Sinai (Exod 5:1-3) that would ratify the Sinai covenant (Exod 24:4-8). Notice that this *command* to



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sacrifice at the mountain was not a permanent *law* of sacrifice imposed on Israel for the duration of its national life. In the original terms of the covenant, expressed in the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17) and the Covenant Code (Exod 21–23), the worship of Israel was envisioned more or less according to the patriarchal pattern—that is, with altars made of natural materials and reared in various places (Exod 20:24–26), coupled with a simple calendar of feasts that followed the rhythms of the agricultural seasons (Exod 23:14–17). Nothing in these stipulations defines or decrees the types and manners of sacrifice to be offered to Yahweh. The prophet Jeremiah was aware of this original situation when he addressed the issue centuries later: “For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices” (Jer 7:22). Likewise, Moses himself had reminded the people that, after the original Sinai laws were given, the Lord “added no more” stipulations (Deut 5:22).

The structure of the Sinai covenant changed dramatically, however, after the golden-calf incident. Some revisions were made to the original terms of the covenant, such as the change in status for the firstborn sons of Israel (cf. Exod 22:29 and 34:20). Mainly, however, the Law was expanded with a host of new requirements and institutions for worship. Israel, having disgraced itself before the calf idol, was now instructed to build a sanctuary (the Tabernacle) to ordain a professional order of clergymen to mediate the relationship between Yahweh and the lay tribes (the

Aaronic priests assisted by non-priestly Levites), to observe a detailed calendar of festivals on an annual cycle (Lev 23:4–44), to maintain standards of ritual purity as a condition for participating in Israelite worship (Lev 11–15), and to follow a canon of sacrificial liturgies, taking the greatest care to ensure ceremonial precision (Lev 1–7). The context in which these additional laws were given—the aftermath of Israel breaking the original Sinai arrangement—points to a direct and causal connection with this antecedent tragedy. In other words, it implies that Yahweh responds to Israel’s weakness for idolatry with strict guidelines for giving true worship to the true God. Viewed in this way, the Mosaic system of sacrifice, along with the ritual institutions that accompanied it, was a yoke of correction designed to steer Israel away from idolatry and to order their prayers, praises, and petitions to Yahweh alone. Serving as a safeguard against idol worship, it helped to reinforce the Mosaic doctrine of monotheism. This rationale for sacrifice was acknowledged in Jewish tradition (e.g., Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3.32) and is nicely summarized as a tenet of Christian interpretation by Saint Thomas Aquinas:

*Wherefore another reasonable cause may be assigned to the ceremonies of the sacrifices, from the fact that thereby men were withdrawn from offering sacrifices to idols. Hence too it is that the precepts about the sacrifices were not given to the Jewish people until after they had fallen into idolatry, by worshipping the molten calf: as though those sacrifices were instituted so that the people, being ready*



*to offer sacrifices, might offer those sacrifices to God rather than idols. (Summa theologiae I-II, q.102, a.3)*

The same basic interpretation was put forward by early theologians such as Saint Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 19), Saint Athanasius (*Festal Epistles* 19.4), and Saint John Chrysostom (*Discourse against Judaizing Christians* 4.6.5). It is also expounded in ecclesiastical writings such as the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (6.4.20) and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (chap. 26).

Historically, then, sacrifice was seen as a form of “redirection” away from idolatry. But the ancient perspective did not stop there. Sacrifice in its Mosaic form was also seen as a “renunciation” of the idols themselves. In other words, the animals of Israelite sacrifice were animals revered in Egyptian religion as images of the gods and goddesses. Mnevis, for example, was worshipped under the form of a bull, Apis under the form of a bull calf, Hathor under the form of a cow, and Khnum under the form of a ram. To slay these animals in sacrifice was to declare war on Egyptian idolatry. The religion of Israel was thus defined in opposition to the religion of Egypt. All that Egypt revered in its idol cults, Israel renounced as false gods, and this in the very act of worshipping the true God.

The basis for this interpretation lies in the canonical narrative of Scripture. It involves, first, looking at Israel’s situation before the Exodus and, second, examining the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh.

The book of Exodus describes Israel’s time in Egypt as a time of grueling oppression and

state-sponsored enslavement (Exod 1:8–14). No direct statements are given, however, to inform the reader of Israel’s spiritual condition in the pre-Exodus period. Insight into this matter comes later in the biblical tradition. For example, Joshua makes the curious statement that his ancestors “in Egypt” had served the foreign “gods” of the land (Josh 24:14). This is a claim that the Israelites, pressed under the yoke of Egyptian rule, had also placed themselves under the yoke of Egyptian deities. They had become not just slaves in need of liberation but idolators in need of spiritual reform. The same point is made by the prophet Ezekiel, who decries the fact that Israel, while still in bondage, refused to cast aside “the idols of Egypt” (Ezek 20:7). It is no surprise, given these explicit biblical testimonies, that Israel’s attachment to idolatry in Egypt would be taken for granted in several works of Jewish (e.g., *Leviticus Rabbah* 22.5) and Christian (e.g., Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 1.6) traditions.

Another side of this crisis comes into view when Moses negotiates with Pharaoh for the release of Israel. Before the decimation of Egypt with plagues, which finally broke the shackles of bondage for Israel, Moses had merely asked for a holiday in which the people could sacrifice to Yahweh at Sinai (Exod 5:1–3). Given Israel’s assimilation to Egyptian culture, this was an opportunity to reclaim their ancient faith in Yahweh and to renounce the idols of Egypt once and for all. But Moses foresees a problem when Pharaoh permits them to sacrifice within the land of Egypt: “It would not be right to do so,” he says, “for we shall sacrifice to



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the LORD our God offerings abominable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?" (Exod 8:25–26). The unstated premise is that Yahweh is asking his people to sacrifice animals that represent Egyptian deities. Had Israel done so in the land of Egypt itself, it would have faced the violence of a nation outraged by perceived acts of sacrilege.

Admittedly, this interpretive view of sacrifice is not widely known or acknowledged among modern biblical scholars. Nevertheless, several ancient texts make precisely this point—namely, that Moses understands sacrifice as a cultic destruction of Egypt's idols. Consider the following quotations from Jewish antiquity, which give an expanded paraphrase of the Exodus passage in question:

*Then the Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go and sacrifice before your God in the land." And Moses said, "It is not proper to do so, because we are taking the cattle which the Egyptians worship to sacrifice before the Lord our God; here we will be sacrificing the cattle which the Egyptians worship and they would be seeing it; would they not intend to stone us?" (Targum Onqelos at Exod 8.21–22)*

*And Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said: "Go, sacrifice before the Lord your God in the land of Egypt." And Moses said: "It is not right to do so, because the idols of the Egyptians are an abomination, from which we must take to sacrifice before the Lord, our God. Behold, if we sacrifice the idols of the Egyptians in their presence, it is impossible that they should not stone us. (Targum Neofiti at Exod 8.21–22)*

*And Moses said it is not right to do so, because the Egyptians worshipped cattle as gods. (Exodus Rabbah 11.3)*

Similar statements can be found in ancient Christian texts that grapple with the meaning of sacrifice. Again, consider the following quotations.

*You should know . . . that because God determined concerning them that they should not worship calves, the gods of the Egyptians, he distinguished for them among foods and commanded them to sacrifice offerings of the very things they had feared in the land of Egypt. For the Lord had no need of sacrifices and offerings. But in order to restrain the Jews from sacrifices and offerings so that they should not worship the gods of the peoples—when they would enter the land and be mixed among the peoples—as they had worshipped the gods of the Egyptians when they had entered Egypt and been mixed among the Egyptians, he therefore forbade and restrained the Jews. (Saint Aphrahat, Demonstrations 15.6)*

*In all respects mentioned, there was a suitable reason for these animals, rather than others, being offered up in sacrifice to God. First, in order to prevent idolatry. Because idolators offered all other animals to their gods, or made use of them in their sorceries: while the Egyptians (among whom the people had been dwelling) considered it abominable to slay these animals, wherefore they used not to offer them in sacrifice to their gods . . . For they worshipped the sheep; they revered the ram (because demons appeared under the form thereof); while they employed oxen for agriculture, which was reckoned by them as*



*something sacred. (Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae I-II, q.102, a.3)*

*"Let us go on a journey of three days" (Exod 3:18). It does not say of one or two days, because this would not be sufficiently far enough away from the Egyptians, who would stone them if they knew they were sacrificing animals which they worshipped as gods. (Nicholas of Lyra, Postilla super totam Bibliam at Exod 3.18)*

History reveals that even non-Jewish and non-Christian writers perceived the antagonism implicit between the worship of Israel and the cults of Egypt. The first quotation below comes from Manetho, an Egyptian priest of the Hellenistic period, whose work survives only in fragments. The second is by the famed Roman historian Tacitus. As both writers see it, Mosaic religion is intentionally and diametrically opposed to all things Egyptian.

*He [Moses] then, in the first place, made this law for them, that they should neither worship Egyptian gods, nor should abstain from any one of those sacred animals, which they have in the highest esteem, but kill and destroy them all; that they should join themselves to nobody but to those that were of his confederacy. When he had made such laws as these, and many more such as were mainly opposite the customs of the Egyptians, he gave order that they should use the multitude of the hands they had in building walls about their city. (Manetho, quoted in Josephus, C. Ap. 1.26)*

*Moses, wishing to secure for the future his authority over the nation, gave them a novel form of worship, opposed to all that is prac-*

*ticed by other men. Things sacred with us, with them have no sanctity, while they allow what with us is forbidden . . . They slay the ram, seemingly in derision of Hammon, and they sacrifice the ox, because the Egyptians worship it at Apis. (Tacitus, Hist. 5.4)*

In the end, it must be recognized that sacrifice in the OT period not only took various forms and served various functions, it was also layered with various levels of symbolism and meaning. Its positive aspects served to draw the covenant people toward the Lord and a fuller surrender to his will, while its negative aspects pulled them away from sin, especially from the corruption of idolatry.

### III. THE PERFECTION OF SACRIFICE

Sacrifice finds its definitive meaning and efficacy in the NT period. Its perfection consists not of a last refinement of the Mosaic cult itself but of Jesus Christ offering his life as a vicarious sacrifice for the world. By extension, the Christian message also calls believers to a life of sacrificial service in imitation of the Lord.

#### A. Sacrifice of Christ

On the surface, the Gospel narratives seem to portray the death of Christ as little more than a criminal execution. The preacher from Nazareth was from the nonpriestly tribe of Judah, he was condemned as a blasphemer by the Jewish high priest, his blood was shed by a squad of Roman soldiers, and his life was finally surrendered outside the walls of Jerusalem, at some distance from the precincts of the Temple. Given these facts, it is legitimate



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to ask how the crucifixion of Jesus could be interpreted as a sacrifice at all, much less as the most perfect sacrifice of all. The question demands attention because this is the unanimous interpretation of his death in earliest Christianity.

The origin of the sacrificial interpretation is traceable to Jesus himself. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus both forewarned of his impending death and foretold of its sacrificial character. Consider his discourse at the Last Supper. In the words of consecration, Jesus said over the Eucharistic cup: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Certainly the shedding of his blood insinuates a violent death, a slaying and taking of his life. But to Jewish ears, these words also resonate with sacrificial implications. The reason for this is rooted in the narratives of the book of Exodus and the prophecies of the book of Isaiah.

The Exodus background is twofold. First, the expression "blood of the covenant" is an allusion to the words of Moses at Mount Sinai. The occasion is the ratification of the Mosaic covenant, which was sealed by a liturgy of sacrifice and these solemn words of interpretation: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you" (Exod 24:8). For Jesus to apply this expression to himself indicates that the pouring out of his own blood will be a cultic sacrifice and the founding event of a new covenant. Second, since Christ spoke these words in the midst of a Passover meal, it must be remembered that the slaying of the Paschal lamb, which formed

the centerpiece of the Seder banquet, is described in Exodus as a "sacrifice" (Exod 12:27). The implications of this cultic backdrop for understanding both the death of Jesus and the sacrament of the Eucharist that anticipated it are inescapable.

The same could be said of Isaiah's influence on the words of Jesus. Again, looking at the Eucharistic consecration, several scholars have detected a reference to Isaiah's fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13–53:12). This is the poem of the Suffering Messiah, the disturbing vision of Yahweh's beloved Servant submitting himself to the ridicule and rejection of his own people, even unto death. Why is this significant? Because the song comes to a climax with the Servant offering his life as a sacrifice for human sin. It is clear that Jesus had this oracle in mind when he uttered the words of consecration: he refers to his lifeblood being "poured out," just as the Servant "poured out" his life unto death (Isa 53:12); he offers himself for "many," just as the Servant was said to justify "many" (Isa 53:11) and bears the iniquity of "many" (Isa 53:12); and the effect of his sacrifice is the remission of "sins," just as the whole mission of the Servant was to make himself "an offering for sin" (Isa 53:10).

Little wonder, given the gospel traditions of the Last Supper, that the crucifixion of Christ was interpreted as a sacrificial offering. One often sees this tradition in Paul, where the memory of Jesus slain is the memory of a Paschal lamb having been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7). So, too, the obedience of Christ the Servant results in "many" being made "righteous" (Rom 5:19), just as we see in the song of the Suffering



Servant (Isa 53:11). Several times Paul ventures beyond these traditional motifs and describes the crucifixion in words drawn from other sacrificial passages of the OT, as when he says: "Christ gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2, recalling the Greek versions of Gen 8:20–21 and Exod 29:18). The apostle John likewise follows this line of interpretation with his claim that "the blood" of Jesus "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). This, one should note, is the language of expiatory sacrifice, the victim's blood having been shed for the remission of sins (cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Other passages could be cited as well that give witness to the sacrificial interpretation of Christ's death in the NT period (e.g., John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 1:18–19; Rev 5:6–10).

Nowhere is the sacrifice of Jesus more extensively pondered than in the book of Hebrews. Everywhere the Christology of Hebrews is shot through with priestly and cultic significance. The point is to show that Jesus, by offering his sinless life to the Father, has made the definitive sacrifice that surpasses all others; and in doing so, he has sealed a new and eternal covenant (Heb 8:6–7; 13:20). In particular, the offering of Christ's "body" (Heb 10:10) and "blood" (Heb 9:12) relativizes the entire system of Mosaic sacrifice. This is because the sacrifice of Christ achieved a true expiation of sin that cleanses the conscience of the worshipper (Heb 9:14; 10:22) and need not be repeated (Heb 9:25–26; 10:14–18). It thus stands in contrast to the blood of animal sacrifices, which were incapable of taking away sins (Heb 10:1–4) and of purifying anything but the exterior

of the person from ritual defilements (Heb 9:9–10, 13). Of peculiar interest, Hebrews extends the reach of Christ's sacrifice beyond his death on the Cross to include his Ascension into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 4:14; 9:24). The typology underlying this theology is the Day of Atonement liturgy, where the blood of the sacrificial victim was processed into the holy of holies (Heb 9:6–14; cf. Lev 16:1–19). Inasmuch as the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle was an earthly image of heaven (Heb 9:24), the idea is that Jesus, assuming the role of high priest and victim, has taken his blood once for all into the celestial sanctuary of God, thereby achieving an "eternal redemption" on our behalf (Heb 9:12).

#### *B. Sacrifice of Christians*

Sacrificial themes are not confined to the actions of Christ in the NT but are likewise applied to Christians. In one sense, this is implicit in the teaching of Jesus, who summons his followers to "take up the cross" in imitation of him (Matt 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:27). Once he describes his own crucifixion in cultic and sacrificial terms, it follows that the life of Christian discipleship would have this character as well.

This theme is developed mainly in the epistles of Paul, who uses sacrificial images and ideas to describe an array of Christian activities. For instance, he urges believers to present their "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). This is an appeal for such things as chastity, temperance, mortification, and other actions of gospel morality and spirituality that surrender the body and its



## SADDUCEES

cravings to the will of the Lord. Other forms of sacrifice include monetary giving, such as the gift that Paul received from the church of Philippi, which he calls “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). Missionary labor is likewise described in such terms, for Paul considered his ministry among the Gentiles a form of “priestly service” in which converts from the pagan world are made an “offering” to God (Rom 15:16). Similarly, his preaching is described as spreading “the fragrance” of Christ’s message to the world, much like incense that wafts through the courts of the sanctuary (2 Cor 2:15). Finally, as Paul sees it, the prospect of martyrdom is a prospect of being “poured as a libation” upon the “sacrificial offering” of faith (Phil 2:17; cf. 2 Tim 4:6).

Similar encouragement is given later in the NT, where readers are summoned to “offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb 13:15). Assurance is given that “such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:16).

Though sometimes unrecognized, the sacrificial character of Christian living is implied in depictions of the Church as the Temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19–22). The reason is that, in the ancient biblical world, temples were not simply dwelling places for God or another pagan deity, but houses of sacrificial worship. To take one example, Peter has this close connection between temples and priestly sacrifice in mind when he exhorts: “[L]ike living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:6).

Underlying these themes is a theology of participation. So far as the teaching of the NT is concerned, Christ is not viewed as a sacrificial substitute whose action on the Cross eliminates either the need or the propriety of additional offerings made by the Christian faithful. Rather, believers are called by the gospel to imitate the life of Jesus so far as this is possible with God’s help. Sacrifice is a major part of this equation. No longer, as in OT times, is the sacrifice required of believers merely an animal or food that represents the worshipper before God. Now, by the perfect offering of Christ, the world is shown the ultimate meaning of sacrifice: it is a gift of loving obedience that surrenders the whole person—heart, mind, and body—to the altar of God’s will.

**SADDUCEES** One of the major sects of Palestinian Judaism in New Testament times. The Sadducees may have derived their name from **Zadok**, high priest at the time of David and Solomon, or possibly from the Hebrew word *ṣaddiq*, “righteous.” The Sadducees are known chiefly through Josephus and the NT Gospels and Acts. They were, with the **Pharisees**, one of the two major religious schools.

The Sadducees were an elite or aristocratic element in Judaism. They were largely members of the priesthood and came from the most powerful of the priestly families. They were disliked for their haughty demeanor and judgmental attitudes.

The teachings of the Sadducees differed from those of the Pharisees in a variety of ways. They denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels and the soul