

## **WHERE'S THE BLOOD?**

*The LORD said, I do forgive, just as you have asked (Numbers 14:20)*

In my discussion with Christians, I'm often asked how Jews receive atonement. My response is simple: acknowledgement of sin, confession of sin and cessation of sin, along with asking God for forgiveness. In our prayer liturgy, recited three times a day, we ask God for absolution for the wrongs committed against Him. Confident that God forgives us, we say our morning prayers: My God! The soul that you have given me is pure.

My soul is the essence of me, and the liturgy teaches that its most fundamental quality is its purity. No matter how I miss the mark in my daily undertakings, every morning I begin with a clean slate.

Of course, a second question usually follows: How can one receive atonement without sacrifice? Isn't blood essential in expiating sin? The Old Testament sacrifices, I'm told, paved the way for the one ultimate (human) Sacrifice. Leviticus describes the sacrificial rites at great length, and some were indeed used to atone for sin. However, one should not think it was believed that sins were somehow magically removed when an animal was slaughtered. We were not "buying off" an angry deity with blood and guts. Rather, the sacrifices were understood as the ritual that symbolically reconnected sinners to God.

The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, derived from the root *korav* meaning to "come close." The atonement offerings were meant to bring someone who was far away near once again. God does not lack anything, nor does He need our sacrifices. The offerings brought in the Temple were not brought for God's benefit. They were brought for us.

Glancing at the offerings described, many seemed to have served the purpose of fines, and many had nothing to do with atonement, such as thanksgiving offerings (Lev. 7:12), peace offerings (Lev. 3:1), holiday offerings (Numbers 28-29), and sacrifices associated with the dedication of the Tabernacle and the priesthood (Lev. 8:14). In the Hebrew canon, Israel is certainly concerned with atonement and avoiding sin, but God doesn't approach His chosen nation with an attitude of wrath, or with a demand for atoning sacrifices before interacting with them in a positive way. Abraham, Moses and David seemed to enjoy a relationship with God and even intimacy during their lives, despite being far from perfect.

The prophets took issue with an emphasis on sacrifices. Samuel said: *Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams* (I Samuel 15:22). Hosea echoes the same sentiment; *For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings* (Hosea 6:6). Amos (5:21) and Isaiah (1:11-14) are even stronger in their protests against sacrifices. However, nothing is stronger than Jeremiah's repudiation (7:21-26).

After the destruction of the Temple, atonement continued by means of confession and subservience, in the spirit of Hosea 14:3—*Take words with you and return to God; say to Him: May You forgive all iniquity and accept good intentions, and let our lips substitute for bulls*. Our sacrifices are by the means of our mouths, similar to what it says in Psalms (51:19): *The sacrifice God desires is a contrite human heart*.

Jews living in a post-sacrificial age don't see sin everywhere we turn, nor feel personally guilt ridden with respect to the manner in which we live our day-to-day lives. Rather we learn to see God everywhere, to recognize Him as a strong presence in everything we do. Reflection as well as daily prayer and Torah study demonstrate our feelings for God and what we recognize to be our responsibilities to Him.

Blood is not part of the expiation process, but rather a heart and soul subservient to His will.

To my friends of CJCUC  
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The following is a response to the recent article “**Where’s The Blood?**”

As indicated in your article, God has always been merciful and forgiving, depending upon the heart attitude of the individual, with or without the blood sacrifice—to this we are in agreement. That the sacrificial system was not intended as an end, in and of itself, is also very clear—again, we are in agreement. That the people of Israel often placed emphasis upon the ritual more than the importance of a proper heart attitude is also very clear—for which reason it is true, the prophets sometimes downplayed the sacrifices. That the sacrificial system “symbolically reconnected sinners to God,” is very true—again, we are in agreement.

However, none of these observations answer the essential question—what exactly was the Divine purpose in the blood sacrifices? In other words, how did the blood sacrifices “symbolically reconnect sinners to God???” Allow me to offer the following answer from the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. After all, the reality of the symbolism was never intended to be a big secret, but rather an obvious illustration.

As one reads the Hebrew Scriptures, he will see a very strong emphasis upon the blood sacrifices and their vital connection to the teaching about atonement for sin and redemption. The Scriptural sacrificial system was not a human invention, but rather a Divine revelation. This is fundamental and axiomatic; nor can there be any ignoring of its intended importance. Just a quick survey of some of the highlights of the history of the nation of Israel will conclusively demonstrate this—

1.) The twelve tribes of Israel were literally delivered out of Egyptian bondage and brought forth as a nation by the application of the blood of the Passover lambs to the doorposts of their houses. This spelled out the redemption of a nation—“*When I see the blood I will Pass Over you*”—Exodus 12:23. The death of a lamb was the immediate substitute for the death of the firstborn.

2.) At the foot of Mount Sinai, Israel came under the terms of the Law Covenant by the application of the **blood** that was sprinkled upon the book of the Covenant and all the people—Exodus 24:5-8. The Covenant was virtually dedicated by blood.

3.) Once the Tabernacle was set up, and God placed Himself in the midst of His people, He sent forth a fire to consume the first sacrifice—Leviticus 9:23, 24.

4.) Again, when Solomon dedicated the first Temple and its services, God Himself sent out a fire to consume the first burnt offering—II Chronicles 7:1-3.

5.) Indeed, the highlight of the liturgical calendar of every year in Israel was the great Day of Atonement, wherein the **blood** of a sacrifice was sprinkled before the Mercy Seat on behalf of the whole nation of Israel—Leviticus 16:15, 21,22. There was no more solemn day than this. In fact, it took two animals to fulfill the symbolism in this sacrificial offering. The first shed its blood, which was sprinkled before the Mercy Seat. The High Priest then placed his hands upon the head of the second animal which was still alive and confessed the sins of the nation, transferring them to this animal. The animal then bore the sins of the nation out into a desolate wilderness symbolizing the judgment

upon sin borne by this substitute. The sprinkling of the blood before the Mercy Seat told us God was satisfied and the atonement for sin was once again obtained ritually on behalf of the nation. While this was being enacted, the nation itself was to be demonstrating an attitude of sorrow and mourning, afflicting their very souls.

These, by way of reminder, were just a few of the highlights that emphasized the sacrificial system and the importance of the blood in respect to the nation.

We can now ask the question, “Do the same Hebrew Scriptures, which manifested the importance of the sacrificial system and the application of the blood, manifest to us the meaning of the symbolism?” The answer to this question is the heart and soul of the Biblical record. It has already been partly answered above by the symbolism of the great Day of Atonement. Now let us go back to the very beginning, examine more carefully how the problem all came about, and discover the full answer—

First of all, it all came about because of the sin and rebellion that had broken the association between God and man. Man had disobeyed God. The life and fellowship with God was broken. The consequent departure from this fellowship brought death and sorrow upon all future generations.

However, for mankind there was redemption and atonement provided. As was stated, it was symbolized in the very sacrificial system. The symbolism is quite simple and yet very profound. The sacrifice provided an obvious substitute on man’s behalf. The sacrifice took the death penalty and the punishment that man deserved. Thus, there was typified an expiation or atonement for sin by way of a sin-bearing substitute.

1.) Actually this was first pictured when God first provided “coats of skins” to “clothe” Adam and Eve. This adequately “covered” their nakedness (Genesis 3:20) when they were expelled from the garden. Hebrew Lexicons say the word, most often translated as “atonement,” is taken from the root verb *kapar* “to cover.” Thus, God’s action provided for the first man and woman suggests a sacrificial atonement (covering).

2.) Soon thereafter we have preserved for us the story of Cain and Abel who both approached God by way of sacrifice. Abel’s was obviously a blood sacrifice “of the firstlings of the flock, along with its fat” (Genesis 4:4). Abel’s sacrifice was his admission of being a sinner in need of God’s mercy provided typically in the sacrifice. God accepted this offering because his heart attitude was right. Cain, on the other hand, did not approach God that way. He offered instead the fruit of his labor from the ground. God did not accept Cain’s offering and the true character of Cain was made manifest—he proved to be a self-righteous murderer.

3.) The degeneracy of mankind increased until the great flood. Immediately after the flood Noah built an altar and “took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Genesis 8:20). In turn God promised to never again visit the earth with such a judgment. At the very same time God instituted the first law commanding mankind to never “eat the blood wherein is the life of the flesh” (Genesis 9:4). The blood herein symbolizes the “Life” of the substitute sacrifice.

4.) This command forbidding the eating of blood is repeated in the Mosaic Law system and the purpose for it is “For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood (life) that makes atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11).

5.) Every person who brought a burnt offering “*put his hand on the head of the burnt offering so that it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him*” (Leviticus 1:4). In this manner the person is identifying with the sacrifice. He deserves death but the sacrificial offering is taking that death in his place. Like on the great Day of Atonement, the sacrifice has placed upon it the sins of the one offering the sacrifice, and consequently it bears the sin penalty—death.

This is the revelation of the ritual system. It clearly symbolized a substitutionary sacrifice on man’s behalf to bear the penalty of sin.

The next question would naturally be—how exactly would this symbolism eventually be fulfilled? The animal sacrifice only provided ritual atonement and did not actually take away the sins of the soul. However, it did foreshadow the real event whereby man can become redeemed and reconciled to God. What is the greater sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world?—

1.) One of the most astonishing events in the Bible is the command of God to Abraham to offer up his well beloved and only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. This is, of course, the son through whom “all of the world would be blessed,” and one of the greatest mysteries in the Bible. It almost defies explanation—unless God opens our eyes. The real problem is to believe what it says. If taken literally, it answers our question! Abraham had said in answer to the question of “Where is the lamb?” by answering—“God will provide Himself the lamb.” Please realize, this answer was not prompted by Abraham having any knowledge of an actual animal being found on top of that mountain. And then, after God intervened for Isaac, Abraham again said—“In this mount the LORD will be seen.” (See Genesis 22:8-14). Taken literally, and in context, Abraham foresaw that this event was intended by God to pre-picture what God, Himself, would one day do on that very spot.

Does this mean that God would provide another Divine person, His own Son, as a sacrifice? That God has a Son there is no question. Psalm 2:7 says—“*Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee...(&) Kiss the Son, lest He be angry with you* (literal trans.).” Proverbs 30:4—“*Who created the earth? What is His name? and what is His Son’s name if you can tell?*” II Samuel 7:11-14—“*I will be to him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son...*” Isaiah 9:6—“*Unto us a Son is given and the government shall be upon His shoulders...*”

2.) As if to ratify the lesson of Abraham and Isaac, a “Man” Who came as a messenger of God (Angel of the LORD),” one day did an amazing thing—He “ascended in the flame of a burnt offering” (Judges 13:16-23). The couple who witnessed the event exclaimed—“we have seen God!” Just imagine, this “Man-God” (Angel of the LORD) actually entered into the very flame of the sacrifice and ascended up to heaven!

3.) This is further amplified in Psalm 40:6-8, where David, by Divine inspiration, impersonated a suffering servant who would take the place of the sacrificial offering—  
“*Sacrifice and offerings You (God) did not desire.*

*My (the servant) ears you have digged out* (literal trans. Exodus 21:6).

*Burnt offerings and sin offerings You (God) did not require.*

*Then I said (the servant) ‘Behold I come; in the volume of the Book*

*it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will (Exodus 21:5), O my God.  
Thy Law is written in my heart.”*

According to the Law of Moses, one who loved his master and would be a perpetual slave would be taken to the doorpost and have his outer ear lobe digged or bored out so as to carry *the mark in his body* of that commitment forever. The Jewish scholars who translated this Psalm into the Greek language (called The Septuagint, approx. 200 BC), took liberty in the translation of the last part of verse 6, and rendered it—“*A body have You prepared me.*” They obviously thought of the Servant as being the antitypical sacrifice.

4.) As if passing through a great museum of art, we finally stand before that grand masterpiece—Isaiah 53, and before our eyes the “Suffering Servant” is “*led as a LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER and as a SHEEP BEFORE HIS SHEARERS is silent...*” Then, “*The LORD lays on him the iniquity of us all*” and He is said to be “*Made an offering for sin.*”

5.) In finality, and still under the Law system, a lone prophet/priest, named John the Baptist, stands on the side of Jordan river and proclaims—“*Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world*”—John 1:29.

Herein our questions are fully answered!

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