



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

How the Guilty Can Be Forgiven

EXODUS 34:6-7

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Many of the laws introduced, debated, and passed in our capitol have penalties attached for the breaking of those laws. It must be determined if the violation of those laws is a misdemeanor or a felony. The amount of the fine or the length of the sentence must be established. This stems from our nation's and our society's ingrained sense of justice. We believe that if laws are broken, there should be a just punishment for that infraction.

We learn from the Bible that each one of us has broken God's law. We also learn that God, as the holy Lawmaker and just Judge must punish each and every infraction of His law. However, God is not only holy and just. He reveals to us that He is also merciful and gracious. This points us to what some have called the great riddle of the Bible:

6"... The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished...

Exodus 34:6-7

God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and forgiving of sin. Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. How can this be? How can God forgive sin and yet not leave the guilty unpunished? The answer is through the suffering and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, though innocent and sinless, took the penalty of sin which we deserved upon Himself.

We are considering how the theme or "story" of the whole Bible ultimately points to Jesus Christ. In Luke 24 Jesus taught the disciples how the Old Testament – the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms – pointed to the fact that the Savior had to suffer and die on the cross. One of the pictures or themes used throughout the Old Testament to point to the suffering of Christ is that of **sacrifice**. This is the death of an innocent on behalf of the guilty.

THE NEED FOR SACRIFICE DESCRIBED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We see the need for sacrifice at the very beginning when animals were killed to make garments of skin for **Adam and Eve** (Gen.

3:21). **Cain and Able** made offerings to God and Abel's was acceptable as it was a sacrifice from his flock (Gen. 4:4). **Noah** made sacrifices to the Lord when he left the ark (Gen. 8:20). **Abraham** was commanded by God to offer up his promised son, **Isaac**. There God provided a ram in his place (Gen. 22). We see the striking account of the **Passover** when **Moses** and the **people of Israel** offered up a lamb in place of the firstborn son in each household. (Exodus 12).

In the Old Testament, the need for sacrifice is most clearly described in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus contains the instructions God gave to the people of Israel through Moses as they were camped at the bottom of Mt. Sinai. There we see the law given which shows that God's people are distinct and so should live holy lives. We also see that God's people are sinful, and so should offer sacrifices. Leviticus 1-7 provided the instructions for the sacrifices that were to be made in the tabernacle, Israel's place of worship. Sacrifices are necessary because people inevitably fail to be holy; people inevitably sin. At times food items might be brought, such as a grain-offering. Most often the sacrifice entailed the giving of the finest animals owned, animals "without defect". The sacrifices were to be valuable and costly to the one giving them. The sacrifice was a loss of goods, but more significantly it also involved the destruction of life. God spells out this necessity:

'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.' **Leviticus 17:11**

"Atonement" refers to being made right, or "at one" with an offended God. It speaks of how two estranged parties can be reconciled. How can we who have offended and infinitely holy and righteous God make things right with Him? How can God Who will not allow the guilty to go unpunished demonstrate His compassion, grace, and lovingkindness in forgiving us? **By the sacrifice of an innocent on our behalf**. One of most significant sacrifices for the people of Israel was that offered on "Yom Kippur" or "The Day of Atonement" (Leviticus 16). On that day, a special sin offering was to be offered for the whole nation, and the fact that it was to be offered annually reminded them that no Levitical sacrifice could finally atone for sins. On this day and only on this day the high priest,

BIBLE STUDIES

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representing all the people, entered the presence of God in the Most Holy Place. He entered bearing the blood of a bull and the blood of a goat. First, he would offer the blood of the bull to make atonement for himself—he himself must first be clean—and then he would offer the blood of the goat in order to make atonement for the sins of all the people. On this same day, the high priest places his hands on a second goat and confesses the sins of Israel over it. This goat, the scapegoat, is then released into the desert in order to symbolize the total removal of sin by the penalty of alienation and estrangement.¹

Many find all this talk of blood, death, and sacrifice shocking and disturbing. That really is the point. Leviticus and the rest of the Bible make clear that we all deserve death for our actions. Our own righteousness has failed us and we need a sacrificial substitute. God makes it clear that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). God ultimately provided that sacrifice through His son, Jesus Christ.

THE NEED FOR SACRIFICE FULFILLED IN JESUS CHRIST

The sacrifices of the Old Testament, from the very beginning in Genesis 3, to the Passover in Exodus 12, to the whole system described in Leviticus, all point to, predict, and have their fulfillment in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. We find this described in the New Testament book of Hebrews:

¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Hebrews 9:13-14

That same chapter goes on to describe how Christ “**appeared once for all...to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**” (vs. 26) and that “**Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many**” (vs. 28).

This will help us better understand the descriptions of Jesus we find in the New Testament. John the Baptist proclaimed when he saw Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the

world” (John 1:29). Peter called Christ “a lamb, unblemished and spotless” (1 Peter 1:19). Paul described Christ as “our Passover lamb has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

WHAT WE LEARN FROM THE BIBLE’S THEME OF SACRIFICE

Again many may find the talk of blood and sacrifice disturbing. We may neglect and skim over parts of the Old Testament such as Leviticus. We may say that is the “Old Testament God” of wrath, anger, and vengeance, preferring instead the “New Testament God” of love and grace expressed in the life and teaching of Jesus. But we need to see they are both part of the same story. The sacrifices described in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New, give us the answer to the riddle of how God who “will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” can show His compassion, grace, and lovingkindness in forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin”. He does so by providing His own Son as a sacrifice to pay the penalty and absorb the punishment for our sin. God has provided the way for our atonement and forgiveness. We simply appropriate through faith, believing in Christ and what He did for us.

CONCLUSION

There are some important truths we must learn from the Bible’s emphasis on sacrifice. First, ***God is Holy***. He is an infinitely Holy God, and an absolutely just judge. We have broken His law and hence, must be punished. As one writer said “Let us never forget that the heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against.” Secondly, ***sin is serious***. We tend to minimize our sin (especially the ones that *we* commit). The fact that making sin right requires death shows us how serious sin really is. Finally, ***Atonement is costly*** and requires the death of an innocent in place of the guilty.

- **WE MUST TRUST IN CHRIST’S RIGHTEOUSNESS ALONE. NO ONE ELSE CAN ATONE FOR OUR SINS. IF WE WANT TO FIND MERCY, WE MUST FIND IT IN CHRIST OR WE WILL NOT FIND IT AT ALL.**

¹ Dever, Mark; Graeme Goldsworthy (2006-04-10). *The Message of The Old Testament* (p. 125). Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.