

Types and Shadows

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The Sacrificial System

As you compare the Old and New Testaments, you will find a common theme of revelation interlacing both Testaments. What is begun in the Old is finalized in the New. Our understanding of God's nature – his love, holiness, power and wisdom – is established in the Old Testament but comes to its fullest revelation in the New Testament. Likewise, the human condition is revealed as pitifully falling short of God's expectations, attested to from the earliest chapters of **Genesis** and seen in their finality in the book of **Revelation**.

Yet despite their common ground, the two Testaments also have a distinct divide. The one principal difference between the Testaments lies in their answer to a fundamental question:

How can a sinner live in fellowship with a holy God?

From the first few chapters of **Genesis**, people realized that they were tainted by sin, living in violation of God's righteous standard and separated from the holy presence of God. But how could this be overcome? How could mankind rediscover the original pre-fall state of relationship with God?

The answer to the fundamental question of how to restore fellowship with God is the core subject of both Testaments, and the answer in each, though different in method, has the same essential core: blood sacrifice.

There is "a scarlet thread of redemption" running right throughout the Bible. As W. A. Criswell describes it:

"The Bible is a book of redemption. It is that or nothing at all. It is not a book of history, science, anthropology, or cosmogony. It is a book of salvation and deliverance for lost mankind."¹

A Tapestry of Types

The Tabernacle of Moses

The Tabernacle of David

The Sacrificial System

The Restoration of the Temple

The Gates of Jerusalem

The Feasts of Israel

Two Mountains

The High Priest

The Torn Veil

The scarlet thread of redemption, and the recurring redemptive act of blood sacrifice, can be traced right through Scripture.

- **Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21)** – God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals, which in all probability had been offered in sacrifice to atone for their act of treason. This act of covering is noteworthy, not only because it was instigated at God’s initiative, but also because it was the first recorded shedding of blood in world history.*
- **Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-16)** – The first recorded act of animal sacrifice is the story of Cain and Abel. Here we find Abel’s sacrifice accepted, while Cain’s is rejected. Some might read the story and think that God is just showing favoritism, but God’s own words prove this not to be the case. In **verse 7**, the Lord tells Cain: “If you *do what is right*, will you not be accepted?” This means that Cain already knew what was expected of him. Likewise, **Hebrews 11:4** tells us that “[b]y *faith* Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.” We know that faith comes by hearing a word from God (**Romans 10:17**), so both Cain and Abel had heard the requirement of God for blood sacrifice. Abel responded in faith, while Cain did not.
- **Noah (Genesis 8:20-21)** – After the Flood, Noah offering burnt offerings to the Lord open an altar – an incredible act of faith, given the fact that most of earth’s creatures had been wiped out by the Flood. There is no indication that God specifically required Noah to make this sacrifice; rather, it appears that it was something that Noah and his family already understood to be a requirement from God.†
- **Abraham (Genesis 22:13-14)** – Although faith is what defined Abraham’s walk with the Lord, animal sacrifice was also integral to Abraham’s covenant relationship with God (**Genesis 15:9-20**).
- **Jacob (Genesis 31:53-54)** – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built altars as part of their walk with God (**Genesis 12:7; 26:25; 35:1,7**), and although animal sacrifices are not mentioned in every reference to these altars, it is assumed that both blood sacrifices and other kinds of offerings (**Genesis 35:14**) were made to the Lord (see **Genesis 46:1**).
- **Moses (Exodus 12:2-13)** – From the beginning of the **Exodus** account, we note that sacrifices were understood to be required by the Lord (**Exodus 3:18**), but Israel is later explicitly instructed by God to offer blood sacrifices, firstly as part of the Passover ceremony, and then secondly as part of the code of Mosaic Law (**Leviticus 4:5-7**).

* God’s original warning, “...in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (**Genesis 2:17**, NKJV), was not an idle threat. In one sense, Adam and Eve died *spiritually* the day they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But there is another sense where Adam and Eve’s treasonous act courted the swift judgment of God. This judgment – death – was allayed, however, by the sacrifice that God himself initiated when he covered Adam and Eve with animal skins.

† Note that God commanded Noah to take seven of each clean animal onto the Ark. This shows two things: 1) that the number 7 was already considered to be the perfect number; 2) that the concept of certain “clean” animals for sacrifice was already known prior to the Flood. Behind the command to take an excess of clean animals onto the Ark was the unspoken understanding that some of those animals would be offered in sacrifice.

The modern man might recoil at such prolific spilling of blood, regarding it as barbaric, yet the nature of blood sacrifice indicates the seriousness with which God regards sin. This thread of redemptive blood runs down through the pages of the Old Testament until the coming of Christ.

Three Redemptive Ages

To understand the nature of blood sacrifice and its relation to the believer, whether in the Old or the New Testament, we need to see human history from the perspective of three “redemptive ages.” These three ages are:

The Age of Promise

This age spans from the moment of Adam’s fall to the dawning of the Age of Law on Mount Sinai. The first promise of redemption ever made was given on the heels of Adam’s transgression in the Garden of Eden. In **Genesis 3:15**, God declares to the serpent:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

This promise found its clearest expression in the promise given to Abraham, as explained in **Galatians 3:16**:

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.”

During the Age of Promise, it was the *promise* of the coming redeemer that formed the basis upon which man could relate to God.

The Age of Law

The Age of the Law began with Moses receiving the *torah* (Hebrew for “law”) from God on Mount Sinai. From that point forward, the Mosaic Law became the basis upon which man could relate to God.

But Galatians reveals that the Age of Law was never meant to be a permanent age (**Galatians 3:19**). It was a temporary measure, put in place by God until the coming of the promised redeemer – Christ.

The Age of Grace

From the moment of Christ’s death and resurrection, a new age dawned on mankind. The promise of the coming redeemer had been fulfilled and the Age of Law had come to a close. As John declared in **John 1:17**:

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

* We know from **Revelation 12:9** that God was not just speaking of the natural animosity between man and snake, but that he was addressing the source of the temptation, Satan himself. This promise, as we know, was fulfilled in Christ upon the Cross (**Colossians 2:15**).

Thus Paul was able to state in **Romans 6:14**:

“...you are not under law, but under grace.”

During the Age of Grace, in which we now find ourselves, it is the grace of God, which comes through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, that now forms the basis upon which we can relate to God.

Here is a quick overview of the approximate timespans of each of the redemptive ages:

- **The Age of Promise** – 3,500 years (from Adam to Moses)
- **The Age of Law** – 1,500 years (from Moses to Christ)
- **The Age of Grace** – 2,000 years (from Christ to the present)

As you can see, the Age of Law was the shortest age, sandwiched between the much longer Ages of Promise and Grace. If we look at the books of the Bible, we find that they are organized in the following way:

- **The Age of Promise** – 1 book (**Genesis**)
- **The Age of Law** – 38 books (**Exodus** to **Malachi**)
- **The Age of Grace** – 27 books (**Matthew** to **Revelation**)

We are about to look at the principal basis for a godly life in the Age of Law – the sacrificial system instituted under Moses. But before we do it’s important to understand that even though the predominant characteristic of the Age of Grace is grace, this does not mean that grace was not an intrinsic part of the other two ages. In fact, the grace of God is revealed in the sacrificial system that undergirds the Law of Moses.

As the *Moody Handbook of Theology* explains:

“The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations.”²

Faith and grace are still in operation in all redemptive ages. What changes is the *content* of faith and the *basis* upon which grace is extended. Under both the Old and the New Covenant, salvation is by God’s grace through faith according to the revelation God gave within that redemptive age.

Take, for example, **Habakkuk 2:4**. Although it finds its ultimate fulfillment under the New Covenant (note **Romans 1:17**), this verse is actually a description of an Old Covenant reality:

“...but the righteous will live by his faith.”

Abraham, the key player in the Age of Promise, experienced a righteousness from God by grace through faith. **Genesis 15:6** tells us:

“[Abraham] *believed* the Lord, and [God] *credited [that faith] to him as righteousness.*”

Likewise, David, one of the key players in the Age of Law, made this statement in **Psalm 32:1-2**:

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

In the same way, **Psalm 103:2-4** proclaims:

“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.”

Yet no matter what the redemptive age, the content of faith and the basis of grace *always* involved blood sacrifice.

The Requirement of Blood Sacrifice

Blood sacrifice is a distinctive element of every redemptive age:

- **The Age of Promise** – *unregulated* blood sacrifice
- **The Age of Law** – *codified* blood sacrifice
- **The Age of Grace** – *fulfilled* blood sacrifice

As **Hebrews 9:22** observes:

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*”

Read Matthew 26:28

Read Ephesians 1:7

As we see from these two New Testament passages, the need for blood sacrifice has not gone away. It has simply been fulfilled in Christ. In fact, it can be said that all blood sacrifice performed in both the Age of Promise and the Age of Law pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ. As the *Explorer’s Bible Study* explains:

“[Old Testament] believers looked forward in faith to the work of redemption of God’s promised provision which the blood sacrifice in the Old Testament anticipated or foreshadowed, as we today look back to the Cross in faith, believing in the completed work of Christ’s death and resurrection.”³

Before we study the Old Testament types in depth, let’s look at an overview of what the New Testament teachings about the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

The concept of Jesus’ death upon the Cross being a blood sacrifice runs through the writings of the New Testament. Just take a look at the following scriptures:

Read Matthew 26:28

Read Romans 3:25

[Read Romans 5:9](#)
[Read Ephesians 1:7](#)
[Read Colossians 1:19-20](#)
[Read Hebrews 9:14](#)
[Read Hebrews 10:19](#)
[Read Hebrews 13:12](#)
[Read 1 Peter 1:2,18-19](#)
[Read Revelation 5:9](#)

In the New Testament, there is a constant echoing of the Old Testament sacrificial code. But in the Old Testament there is also the allusion to the coming fulfillment of the sacrificial system.

Read Isaiah 53:5-10

In this prophetic description of the death of Christ, Isaiah calls the death of the Suffering Servant a “guilt offering,” a concept also reiterated in [Romans 8:3](#):

“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man *to be a sin offering...*”

Guilt offering? Sin offering? These are terms drawn from the codes of sacrifice established under the Law of Moses. So let’s take the plunge and look in closer detail at the sacrificial system described in [Leviticus](#).

The Five Sacrifices

[Leviticus 1-6](#) provides us with the five main types of sacrifice in the Mosaic sacrificial system, in the following order:

- The burnt offering
- The grain (or meal) offering
- The fellowship (or peace) offering
- The sin offering
- The guilt (or trespass) offering

[Leviticus](#) lists them in a descending order according to God’s pleasure with the sacrifice. Thus the highest and best of all the sacrifices, causing God the greatest pleasure, is the burnt offering, while the sacrifices that are least pleasing to God, yet still essential to relationship with him, are the sin and guilt offerings.

In our study of the five sacrifices of [Leviticus](#), we’re going to look at the prescribed offerings in *reverse* order, since the early offerings are the foundation for the latter ones.

Guilt Offering

Read Leviticus 5:14-6:7

The guilt offering, also called the “trespass offering” (KJV) involved the sacrifice

of a ram and was designed to atone for sins committed. **Leviticus 5:18-19** describes the purpose of the guilt offering succinctly:

“He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the Lord.”

The *Believer’s Study Bible* explains that the guilt offering “vividly illustrates the biblical principle that sin against one’s fellowman is ultimately a sin against God.”⁴ Because it “emphasizes the fact that the rights of both God and man had been violated, both sacrifice (to God) and restitution (to fellowman) were necessary.”⁵

The guilt offering was a *mandatory* sacrifice, designed by God to cover the *acts* of sin committed by a person. In this way, it was a pre-picture of the sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross as *the* Lamb of God (**John 1:29**), the one who “takes away the sins of the world.” Note that this ram was to be “without defect,” a qualification met fully in the sacrifice of Christ (**1 Peter 1:19**).

As the *New Living Translation* renders **Hebrews 9:14**:

“Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.”

Sin Offering

Read Leviticus 4:1-5:13

The sin offering was similar in many ways to the guilt offering, but with some notable distinctions. Whereas the guilt offering was designed to atone for a specific offense, the sin offering atoned for both the *person* of an offender and also for the offending nation as a whole (note **Leviticus 4:13-14**). As the *Believer’s Study Bible* explains:

“The purpose of the sin offering was to atone for sins committed *unknowingly*...especially where no restitution was possible.”⁶

In **Leviticus 4:2**, the word translated by the *New International Version* as “unintentionally” literally means “in ignorance.”⁷ Each person is born with a sinful nature – a nature inherited from Adam – that creates an inner bias toward sin. And so God designed a way not just for specific sins to be atoned for, but for the sinner himself to be atoned for.

When Jesus died on the Cross, he not only became our *guilt offering* (dealing with our specific sins), he also became our *sin offering* (dealing with fundamental problem of sin itself). Just as the nation of Israel had to be atoned for through a sin offering, so the entire sin of humanity was resolved in a once-for-all sin offering in Christ Jesus.

The margin notes of the *New International Version* translates **2 Corinthians 5:21** with these words:

“God made him who had no sin *to be a sin offering for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

When Jesus died on the Cross, he not only died *for* you; he also died *as* you! In Christ, God not only dealt with the *products* of sin (the acts you commit), but also the *factory* that produced the sin – you! (**Romans 6:6-7**).

Read 1 John 2:2

Fellowship Offering

Read Leviticus 3:1-17

The third type of sacrifice was for an entirely different purpose than the previous two. It was not offered because of sin committed, but was offered as an expression of thanksgiving to God for fellowship restored.

Read Leviticus 7:11-15

The Hebrew word translated “fellowship offering” (NIV) and “peace offering” (KJV) literally means “a sacrifice of concord or happiness.”⁸This sacrifice was often made at special events of celebration and times of significance in the life of Israel.

Read 1 Kings 8:63

Read 2 Chronicles 29:31-36

Holman Bible Dictionary explains:

“The peace offering...was the only offering in which the offerer shared by eating a portion of the sacrifice...Thus it illustrated fellowship between God and man (as well as between man and man) on the basis of blood sacrifice.”⁹

The fellowship offering was an act of thanksgiving to the Lord for his goodness (**Psalms 107:19-22; 116:12-19**). Thus the New Testament equivalent of the fellowship offering is called the “sacrifice of praise.” **Hebrews 13:15** exhorts us:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God *a sacrifice of praise* – the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

As you express your praise and thanksgiving to God for his goodness to you in all that he has done for you through the sacrifice of Jesus, you are offering the spiritual equivalent of the fellowship offering.

Grain Offering

Read Leviticus 2:1-16

Read Leviticus 6:14-23

The grain offering was an offering from the harvest of the land, and was the only type of sacrifice that required no bloodshed. This sacrifice was an offering to the Lord of the *firstfruits* of the offerer’s harvest of grain. In the New Testament,

Paul speaks of this offering in **Philippians 4:18**, when referring to gifts given by the Philippian Christians:

“I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”

When you offer to the Lord the firstfruits of your material produce, this is the spiritual equivalent of the grain offering.

Burnt Offering

Read Leviticus 1:1-17

The burnt offering was a very special sacrifice. Like the fellowship offering and the grain offering, the Bible calls it “an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (**Leviticus 1:17**). This is because the burnt offering represented the worshiper himself, offered in dedication to the Lord.

Read 2 Samuel 24:18-25

When Araunah offered his threshing floor to David free of charge, together with oxen and wood for sacrifice, David refused. His explanation defines the very nature of the burnt offering. There was no way, he said, he could offer burnt offerings that cost him nothing.

The burnt offering is also fulfilled in the New Testament lifestyle. In **Romans 12:1**, Paul writes:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God* – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Notice that it is “in view of God’s mercy” that we are to present our bodies “as living sacrifices.” We do not do so to *get* anything from God; we do so because of what God has *already* done for us! **Ephesians 5:1-2** also gives insight into the nature of spiritual burnt offerings:

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

What was this fragrant offering and sacrifice to God that we are to imitate? How did Christ offer himself up to his Father as “an aroma pleasing to the Lord”? We know from **Leviticus** that the guilt offering and the sin offering were *not* an aroma pleasing to God. Therefore Paul is referring here to Jesus offering himself as a burnt offering to his Father. The *death* of Christ on the Cross fulfills the type of the guilt offering and the sin offering, but the *life* of Christ fulfills the type of the burnt offering! Christ didn’t just present his body to die on the Cross; he presented his body as a living sacrifice to his Father!

This is what we are now called to imitate! Live a life of love, Paul says, in the same

way that Christ gave himself totally to God as a burnt offering! When you offer yourself in total loving service to the Lord, you are offering the New Testament equivalent of the burnt offering.

Read Romans 15:16

Two Types of Sacrifice

The sacrifices – both the Old Covenant type and the New Covenant antitype – fall into two classes:

The mandatory sacrifices

Two sacrifices make up the list of mandatory (compulsory) sacrifices:

- The guilt offering
- The sin offering

These two sacrifices are *not* described as having “an aroma pleasing to the Lord.” They were compulsory because they deal directly with the sin barrier between a person and God. The New Testament fulfillment of mandatory sacrifices is the *once-for-all* sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross.

The book of **Hebrews** is clear that the Old Covenant sacrifices were unable to make those who offered them perfect (**Hebrews 10:1-4**). As the *Explorer’s Bible Study* states:

“The fact that there had to be a constant presenting of the offering was an indication that the results of such were temporary and therefore had need of repetition.”¹⁰

The sacrifice of Christ is a perfect sacrifice precisely because there is no need of repetition! It is a once-for-all act, effective for all time!

Read Hebrews 10:14

The voluntary sacrifices

There are, however, some sacrifices that *are* repeated under the New Covenant. These are the voluntary sacrifices, which include:

- The fellowship offering – *praise and thanksgiving*
- The grain offering – *material wealth*
- The burnt offering – *the whole life*

These sacrifices are repeated on a daily basis, because they are daily *outworkings* of the one supreme sacrifice. Of interesting note is the burnt offering, the fires of which were never allowed to go out, but burned continually (**Leviticus 6:8-13**) – representing the daily, never-ending offering up of the worshiper to God.

In summary, then, the **mandatory sacrifices** – the guilt offering and the sin offering – are *once-for-all* sacrifices, fulfilled totally upon the Cross of Christ. The

voluntary sacrifices – the fellowship offering, the grain offering and the burnt offering – are daily sacrifices, fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit in your day-to-day life. The **mandatory sacrifices** are negative, dealing with sin. The **voluntary sacrifices** are positive, dealing with your ongoing obedience to God.

Better Sacrifices

Read Hebrews 9:23-26

The New Testament does not strictly regard the sacrificial system of the Old Testament to have been abolished but rather fulfilled in Christ (**Matthew 5:17**). It does not teach that there are now *no* sacrifices; it says there are now *better* sacrifices. Thus the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant is seen as a prelude to the ultimate sacrifice of the New Covenant. One is temporary, giving way to the other, which is eternal.

Read Hebrews 10:12

As a New Testament believer, you are part of a new priesthood (**Revelation 1:6**). As a priest under the New Covenant, you are qualified to offering up spiritual sacrifices to the Lord. In **1 Peter 2:5,9**, Peter declares:

“...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, *offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*...But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

¹ W. A. Criswell, “The Scarlet Thread of Redemption,” quoted in the *Believer’s Study Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

² Paul P. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

³ *Explorer’s Bible Study*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁴ *Believer’s Study Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁵ *Believer’s Study Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁶ *Believer’s Study Bible*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁷ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁸ *Holman Bible Dictionary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

⁹ *Holman Bible Dictionary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

¹⁰ *Explorer’s Bible Study*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

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