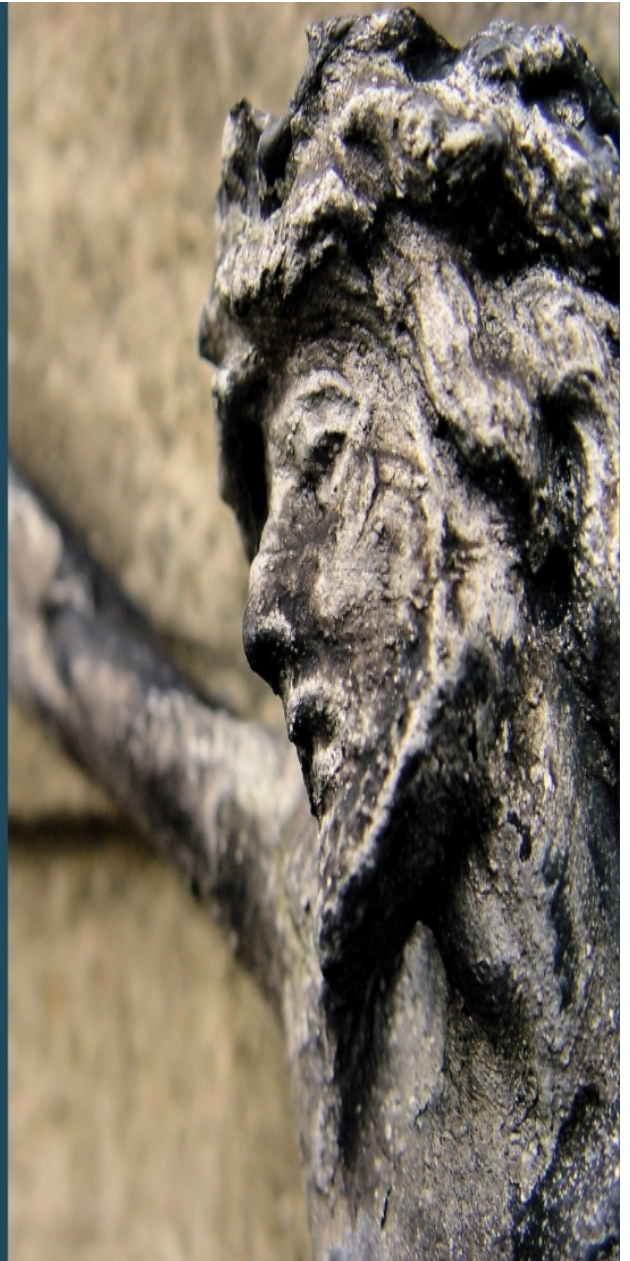


How Does Jesus' Sacrifice Relate to Animal Sacrifice? Part 1

Description

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Part 1



A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 2nd Quarter
The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant
Week 6
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Edited by Trent Wilde

This week's lesson is entitled, "Abraham's Seed," and studies the remnant of God's people who have kept God's covenant over the ages. Friday's first discussion question reads,

"In ancient Israel, the priests made animal sacrifices that pointed to the Messiah. As members of a royal priesthood, what types of "sacrifices" are church members to make? (See 1 Pet. 2:5)."
Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Friday, May 7, 2021

So this week we are going to look at evidence from the bible that will help us understand the teaching that God has given regarding sacrifice for the remnant throughout the ages.

In order to do this, we need to have a correct understanding of how animal sacrifices pointed to the Messiah.

Many are under the impression that the sacrificial animal took the penalty for the sin of the one offering the sacrifice in the days before the cross as a foreshadowing of what Jesus would accomplish. And, in the same way, at the cross, Jesus took the penalty or responsibility for our sins, past, present, and future. In both cases, the way the sacrifice is understood is that God decided that all who disobey him – all who sin, have committed a crime worthy of the death penalty. And that in order for justice to be served, someone simply has to die. But since all have sinned, all have a death sentence hanging over their heads, and since God didn't want everyone to die, he allowed for one person to die in place of another. Since a guilty person can only die for their own sins, it takes an innocent person to take the punishment for someone else. Again, this is the common way that people understand sacrifice – it is a guilty people to escape God's death penalty because God's justice doesn't require the guilty to pay for their own crimes – it just requires that someone pay for them.

This understanding has caused cognitive dissonance for many in regard to the purpose and meaning of "sacrifice" for church members today. This is because, well, if Jesus took the responsibility for our sin at the cross, what sacrifice is really needed today? Many think "sacrifice" for church members today is just an optional icing on the cake because Jesus "paid it all" with His sacrifice. This certainly makes "sacrifice" for church members today seem somewhat arbitrary. And it would be – if this were the correct understanding of the sacrificial system of God throughout the ages.

To tackle this, we need to address two questions. First, what exactly is the nature of Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross? And second, what is the truth about sacrifice before Jesus came to earth? The rest of this article will be devoted to the first question, and next week's article will be devoted to the second question.

So, let's take a closer look at Jesus' sacrifice.

Many are familiar with 1 Peter 2:24 which states that Jesus "bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Most today take this to mean that by doing this, Jesus took the responsibility for our sins and vicariously paid the death penalty God had sentenced upon us so that God would no longer require us to suffer death. But according to the fuller context of 1 Peter 2, we will be able to see that this is not the case, and in turn, learn the true meaning of the phrase "bore our sins in His own body." Understanding this will enable us to understand the sacrificial system of the royal priesthood as it was intended for the people of God through all ages – yesterday, today, and forever.

So, let's start by reading 1 Peter 2:18-25. It reads,

18 Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ ***also*** suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 “Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:18-25

Here we see that 1 Peter is making a parallel between the unjustly punished slave and the unjustly punished Christ. Both are blameless. The servant (or slave) “does good and suffers [unjustly], and takes it patiently” (verses 19-20). This is commendable before God and it is exactly what Christ did for us (verse 21). Christ’s patience in suffering on the cross is put forth as a parallel example for the righteous slave suffering under his harsh (sinful) master.

Verses 22-25 goes on to flesh out the parallelism further. Verse 22 tells us that Christ was sinless, and, like the righteous slave, not deserving of harshness either. In verse 23, Jesus did not revile in return for his harsh treatment. In verse 24, Jesus “bore our sins” in His own body on a tree. “Our sins” are thus paralleled with the slave master’s harshness. The righteous slave can, like Jesus did under the same circumstance, not threaten or revile in return for unjust treatment, but commit himself to God who judges righteously in the end.

The very words following the statement that Christ “bore our sins in His own body on a tree...” are, “...that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness...” So here again, we can see that we are admonished to follow Christ’s righteous, sinless example, die to our own sins, and bear one another’s sins in the same way that Jesus endured our sins, even to the point of death, and live for righteousness instead of retribution.

So here in 1 Peter 2 we can see that sinful humanity is paralleled with the evil slave master – that in the same way the harsh (sinful) slave master unjustly treated his righteous slave, sinful humanity has unjustly treated the righteous Christ. It is clear, then, that when this passage says that Christ ‘bore our sins’ it is not saying that he vicariously suffered a death penalty that God from God; it is saying that he endured our sinful abuse against him. Justice didn’t require him to do this – he could have reviled against us for our unjust abuse of him. But instead of having his own interests at heart, he had our interests at heart and endured our abuse without reviling us in order to make it as plain as possible that we are abusing an innocent man. This calls us to see our sin for what it is, and thus, by looking at the stripes we have inflicted on him, we can be repulsed by sin and turn from it. This is what it means to die to sin – it means to turn from it never to do it again. By seeing our own terribleness in abusing Christ, and by seeing that he is willing to endure it just to give us a chance at having a change in heart, we actually can have that change in heart, and thus be healed of our sins – and no longer stray from God. This passage is telling us that just as Jesus endured our abuses nonviolently and with love for us as a means of attempting to change our hearts, we should likewise endure the sins of others against us without seeking to defend ourselves and revile them. Instead, by bearing their sins as Christ bore ours, we can help them to see the deplorableness of sin and thus to turn from it to live righteously like Christ.

Again, in these verses, for Jesus to “bear our sins” does not mean that He took the responsibility for them, but rather that he endured them for our sake as an example for us, to empower and encourage us to do the same, trusting in the righteous justice of God to vindicate all who live patient, humble, righteous lives just like Jesus, the “Overseer of our souls.”

The implication here is that in the judgment, the unjust slave owner will ultimately take responsibility for his sin and be punished at the hands of a just God. Similarly, those that continue in sin in this life will also be held responsible for their sins. Jesus’ death on the cross does not mitigate that in the least according to 1 Peter 2:18-25. On the contrary, it is in perfect harmony with the doctrine of the investigative judgment and it upholds the third angel’s message.

Revelation 14:12 reads,

Here is the patience of the saints [patience like that of the righteous slave]; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God [who live totally sinless lives] and the faith of Jesus [the same faith Jesus had in the justice and righteousness of God while on the cross and all throughout His life].

From all that we’ve seen, it is clear that 1 Peter is explaining the role Jesus’ death plays in salvation in a very different way from how most people explain it today. The idea that God’s justice doesn’t require the guilty to pay for their crimes, but it just requires someone to pay for them – in fact, someone innocent must suffer – just isn’t what this text describes. There is no hint that what is important to God is for Jesus to die in order that his death can be a substitute penalty for our crimes so that we criminals can escape our just punishment. So does this mean that Jesus’ death wasn’t substitutionary? No, but it does mean that the way we have commonly imagined what it means for his death to be substitutionary is all wrong. Okay, so in what sense is Jesus’ death substitutionary then?

You see, the price of sin is death (Romans 6:23) – all who sin have that fate hanging over their heads. This price can be paid either by dying for our own sins – in which case death will be our final end and the end of our sins. Or we can allow the death of Jesus to change our hearts so that we turn from sin. Jesus was willing to “bear with” our sins and subject Himself to this sin-sick world so that we could see first hand the horrible effects of sin on an innocent person, and therefore be so turned off from sin – that we would be repulsed by it – and reject every temptation to sin thereafter. Jesus lived a sinless, blameless life, and, as a human (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:14, 17) showed us that we could do the same thing (John 8:11; Romans 6:12), if we will learn the lessons of the cross and make Jesus’ death our own. We need to actually put an end to sin in our own lives by accepting His death as our own by dying to self, dying to sin...in the exact same way that Jesus did. Jesus used the moral power of the truth ([hyperlink to FAQ page](#)) and human effort to overcome every temptation to sin, and we are expected to do no less.

By accepting Jesus’ death as our own (Matthew 10:38; Romans 6; 1 Corinthians 15:31; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 5:24) we will let His death put an end to sin in our hearts as verily as our own death would if we were to die the second death.

Basically, Jesus’ death can substitute our death, but it isn’t substituting it as a punishment for God’s sake – for the purpose of satisfying some requirement he has that blood be shed and someone suffer and die. No, Jesus’ death can be a substitute for ours by convincing us to bring an end to our own sins just like our own second death would bring an end to our sins if we don’t repent. Thus, Jesus’ death is only a substitute for ours if we actually make it do to our sins what our own death would – that is, end them. We are the ones who have to make Jesus’ death to be substitutionary for our own in our case. God can’t do that for us, and God will do no such thing in the judgment.

So, this should go a long way in removing the mystery in regard to the purpose and meaning of “sacrifice” for church members today. We are to sacrifice our entire lives to God in the same way Jesus did. This is why Paul said,

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” Colossians 1:24

Paul was simply doing in his life the same thing Jesus was doing in His life. It is no different for us today.

So, how does Jesus’ sacrifice relate to the animal sacrifices in the “Old Testament”?

Find out next week in [“How Does Jesus’ Sacrifice Relate to Animal Sacrifice? Part 2”](#)!