

## **Jesus the Lamb, Part 1**

In the Old Testament, we see the lamb as an important part of the sacrificial system. Our minds first jump to the idea of the Passover lamb, but we see quickly in the Law of Moses that the use of a sacrificial lamb was common. In fact, we see in Exodus 29:39-46 that they were to offer a sacrifice of a lamb every single day. They needed to sacrifice one in the morning and evening. This was a part of consecrating the temple and keeping it holy so that God could be in its presence.

### **Occasions of Sacrifice**

In the Old Testament we see that there are many occasions where one would need to sacrifice a lamb. As stated above, they had it as a daily consecration of the temple. It is also prescribed in several places. We will examine some of those here:

#### *Cleansing Sacrifices*

Under the Levitical Priesthood, sacrifices were often made for cleansing people. These sacrifices were not based on moral misdeeds. It had nothing to do with the character of the person or if they had sinned. Yet there were still things that made people unclean before the Lord. They would follow God's commands to become clean.

One example of this is found in Leviticus 12. Here we see that after having a child a woman would be considered unclean. This uncleanness had actual consequences and affected what she could touch, what she could do, and where she could go. There was a specified amount of time that she would be considered unclean depending on if she had a son or daughter. At the end of this period, she would go to the tabernacle and offer up a lamb in order to be made clean (Leviticus 12:7-8).

Lepers faced a similar issue. The disease of leprosy made one unclean, and Leviticus 13 detailed many laws about how to handle it. Chapter 14 then goes on to describe how they might be cleansed. Verse 10 tells us that on the eighth day of the cleansing process that they are to bring three lambs for sacrifice. Both of these examples show us that God viewed the sacrifice as a way to make someone clean.

#### *Guilt and Sin Offerings*

We also see that the sacrifices were needed to cleanse people spiritually as well as physically. These sacrifices varied in the animal that was actually used for the sacrifice. The lamb is one that is specifically mentioned in both examples.

In Leviticus 4:27-35 we see the pattern set up for guilt offerings. These offerings are to be offered by anyone in the land of Israel who sins unintentionally before the Lord. They needed to

use this sacrifice to make things right with God. They were able to offer either a goat (v. 28) or a lamb (v. 32). Leviticus 5:1-13 discusses a similar sacrifice when someone is found guilty before the Lord. Again, we see that they can use either a goat or a lamb for their sacrifice. In both of these instances we see that a lamb is offered in order to make one right with God when someone has sinned against them.

### *The Passover*

The Passover was established for the Israelites in Exodus 12. The Israelites were in Egyptian captivity, and God had sent 9 plagues already to try and get Pharaoh to release His people. Yet Pharaoh would not relent. God warned Pharaoh that this plague would kill the firstborn in every household (Exodus 11:4-6).

The Israelites were in the land of Egypt as well, and so this plague applied to them as well. Since they were God's chosen people, God provided a way for them to escape this judgment. It required the sacrifice of a lamb for every household (Exodus 12:3). They would take the blood of the lamb and put it on the door post of their house (v. 7). Then they would cook it and the family would partake of it as a meal. They were not allowed to take the meat outside of the house and they were not allowed to break any of the bones of the lamb (v. 46). It was important that no one leave the house until morning (v. 23) because the blood of the lamb purified the house and kept the destroyer out (v. 23). God's judgment on the land of Egypt was kept at bay by the blood of the lamb. It caused God's destroyer to "pass over" the house of the Israelites (v. 27).

This was such a powerful and important moment of God sanctifying His people and protecting them that it became an event that they were commanded to observe every year as a memorial (v. 14). God makes the event even more important in Deuteronomy 16:1-8. When they enter the land of Canaan and the tribes are dispersed, God expects them to come together as one people to participate in the Passover (v. 5). This shows God wanted this to be something that took dedication and effort by His people to observe.

### **The Amount of Sacrifices**

An important consideration when studying the sacrificial system was the sheer amount of animals that were needed to perform all the necessary sacrifices. When looking back at the Old Testament, only a small portion lays out the sacrificial system. What we forget is that our study of it is only theoretical. Living it day by day would provide a very different perspective. Those who lived under that Law would have had a strong connection to the lamb and to all of the sacrificial animals. They would have been a central figure in their life. To get a better idea of how much the sacrificial system would have been ingrained into the Jewish mindset, let's look at some examples that show just how many sacrifices were made.

As was mentioned in the introduction, Exodus 29:39-46 shows that at the tabernacle they would have sacrificed two lambs every single day. Numbers 28:1-15 expounds upon that and also prescribes offerings every sabbath and every month. Then you add the guilt and sin offerings that were to be offered. If people were honestly evaluating their sins, the priests would be making guilt and sin offerings constantly for a nation the size of Israel. Then you have the example of the sacrifices given for women after childbirth. There are also sacrifices for other festivals and events that we have not explored in this study. The amount of sacrifices would have been staggering.

In 2 Chronicles 30 we see King Hezekiah imploring people of both nations to return to God and he invites them to celebrate the Passover (v. 2-9). In verse 24 we see the amount of bulls and sheep provided for the people by the king and the princes. It totals 17,000. This may not include the sacrifices that the people themselves brought. Josiah does the same thing in 2 Chronicles 35. This Passover was even greater. We see over 35,000 lambs being offered for the Passover. It is hard to fathom the amount of work that the priests had to do in order to perform all these sacrifices. While these passages may show us a higher amount than what most Passovers would have required (v.18), it helps give us a better picture of how someone who lived under the Old Law would look at the required sacrifices.

### **The Purpose of the Sacrifice**

When looking back at the Old Testament, we might wonder why there is such a need for the death of all these animals. Why was it necessary for two lambs to be killed every day? Why were over 50,000 lambs killed in just two Passovers? Why did God command for all of this death to occur?

Leviticus 16:18-19 is instructive for us in understanding God's desire for sacrifice. In this chapter, God is setting the guidelines for the Day of Atonement when God will come into the presence of the people and they will be forgiven their sins. The altar needs to be atoned for. In verse 19, that process is accomplished by taking the blood and sprinkling it on the altar 7 times. In doing so it will "cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the people of Israel". Here we see that the blood is a cleansing agent. It takes things that are dirty and makes them clean again.

We typically do not think of blood as something to use for cleaning. Why would God use it as such in the Old Testament? Leviticus 17:10-16 gives us the answer. God, when explaining the command not to eat blood, tells us that "life is in the blood". Sin brings about death, and that is the promise that God has made from the very beginning (Genesis 2:17). That death transforms not just us, but everything that we come in contact with. The sins of the people and the priests made the altar unclean (Leviticus 16:19) just by their presence. God needed to counteract that death. To do so He set up the sacrificial system. He had the people take a lamb that was living. They took its blood to give themselves the life they had lost through sin (Leviticus 17:11). The life that was in the blood removed the death, whether from the person or, as in Leviticus 16:18,

the altar. It was in this way that the people could forestall the judgment of death that was due to them because of their sin.

1. What were some of the types of sacrifices that used a lamb?
2. What were some things that would make someone unclean, requiring the sacrifice of a lamb?
3. What was required for a guilt or sin offering?
4. What was the required animal for the Passover?
5. What would you do with its blood? Why was its blood important?
6. According to Numbers 28:1-15, how often would sacrifices of lambs need to be made?
7. How many lambs were used for King Josiah's Passover?
8. In Leviticus 16:18-19, what caused the altar to be unclean?
9. Why was the blood of animals not to be eaten?
10. How would the blood of a lamb cleanse a person or object?