

## The Distinctive and Salvific Nature of Animal Sacrifice in Judaism

Seminar: The History of Animals  
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### **Introduction, Background, and Historiography**

The word sacrifice carries a certain connotation in modern societies that implies a kind of necessary, religious construct. Sacrifice, in the English language, refers to “the system of worship which has its most characteristic and effective action in the slaughter of a victim.”<sup>1</sup> However, this was not solely the case for societies in Antiquity. Sacrifice, and animal sacrifice in particular, was an expression of not only theological dogmas, but of culture, politics, and collective effervescence. Essentially, sacrifice was an integral part of societal function in many ancient civilizations. In the past, historians and anthropologists were divided over the purposes and motivations of what they called “Sacrifice in General”. There were those who, like E. B. Tylor, argued that sacrifice in primitive religions was comprised solely of the vertical aspect, that is to say that sacrifices were performed primarily as gifts to the gods.<sup>2</sup> The animal that was killed served as a medium to placate the gods and win their favor. Those who adhered to this view believed that there was little to no societal implications of sacrifice, it was executed exclusively in concordance with basic, totemic beliefs to placate the gods. Frazer, in his *The Golden Bough*, argued similarly in positing that animal sacrifices were meal offerings to ancestral gods or for crop fertility and protection of livestock.<sup>3</sup> Others like W. Robertson Smith believed that “Sacrifice in General” was primarily a horizontal, societal interaction in that it was a

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1 Sykes, Stephen. *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 9

2 Tylor, Edward B.. *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*. London: John Murray , 1920. 375

3 Frazer, James . *The Golden Bough*. 3. ed. London: Macmillan, 1966. 110

collective ritual that brought the community together in the partaking of the sacrificial meal. By eating the sacrificed animal, the community members were invigorated with new vitality that stemmed from the life-flow of the sacrificial creature and affirmed their common links to each other and to the divine via the sacrificed totemic figure: "...when an animal is sacrificed, the sacrificer and the deity feast together, part of the victim going to each..."<sup>4</sup> Some historians like Maria Zoe-Petropoulou attempt to reconcile several of these seemingly, mutually exclusive perspectives in arguing for the intersection of the two axes. She believes that we can only understand the mechanism of animal sacrifice in bridging the gap between the vertical axis, the aspect that links humans to deity, and the horizontal axis, the aspect that links humans to each other and the external, natural world.<sup>5</sup>

### **The uniqueness of Israelite Animal Sacrifice in Antiquity**

Ancient Judaism is unique when compared to other collective or social religions of the ancient world in that it is a monotheistic faith. This may not sound unique to religion in modern Western society, but in Antiquity, monotheism was a rarity. Gary Anderson, in his authoritative work on Pre-Second Temple Israelite animal sacrifice says, "The distinctiveness of the Israelite cult is nothing other than the limitation of cultic activity to one particular patron deity."<sup>6</sup> Thus, at its core, Ancient Judaism is different from its contemporary, neighboring counterparts found in Canaan. This premise does not lead to the conclusion that animal sacrifice, its motivations, rituals, purposes, and theological implications, in Judaism is different from other contemporary, Canaanite cults, but this is true, nonetheless, for other reasons. Animal sacrifice is also unique in ancient Judaism when compared to

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4 Smith, W. Robertson. *The Religion of the Semites; The Fundamental Institutions*. New York: Meridian Books, 1956. 224

5 Zoe-Petropoulou, Maria. *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. pg 123

6 Anderson, Gary A.. *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987. 3

contemporary Canaanite cults. Even though there may be some superficial similarities between animal sacrifice in ancient Judaism and Canaanite religion, the underlying facts and theological beliefs are very different<sup>7</sup>. This lends to the uniqueness of ancient Jewish animal sacrificial rituals. One of the most obvious areas of difference lies with the question of the anthropomorphic conceptualization of the deity, specifically, the tradition of sacrifice consumption. “Israelite sacrifice is unique because YHWH *does not consume the food*. In contrast to the primitive gods of its neighbors who regularly eat and are clothed, Israel's God was radically different. (*emphasis added*)”<sup>8</sup> In stark contrast to contemporary cults, Israelite animal sacrificial ritual was not meant to feed YHWH, primarily because of the qualities that were attributed to him.

“If I am hungry, will I not tell you?  
For the earth and what fulfills it are mine.  
Do I eat the flesh of bulls,  
the blood of goats do I drink?  
Sacrifice to God praise!  
Fulfill, to the Most High, your vows!”<sup>9</sup>

YHWH did not feast on the flesh of the animals that were being sacrificed nor did he drink their blood, as the Canaanites believed with their gods. The fact that ancient Judaism did not see the animals slaughtered for sacrificial rituals as serving as “sacred meals” for the gods is not only odd, but somewhat shocking, as this was exceedingly common-practice.<sup>10</sup> As Royden Yerkes states, “A commonly accepted explanation of the origin of sacrifice is that it was first a method of feeding the gods, which were imagined as possessed of the desires of human beings.”<sup>11</sup> The Israelite animal sacrifice ritual flies in the face of anthropological theories on the origins of religious rituals and is

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7 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 123

8 Anderson, Gary A.. *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987. 15

9 Psalm 50:12-14

10 Smith, W. Robertson. *The Religion of the Semites; The Fundamental Institutions*. New York: Meridian Books, 1956. 224

11 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 23

classified as an anomaly. Canaanite and Mesopotamian religion also utilized ceremonies of animal sacrifice as opportunities for “egalitarian festivals” in which the horizontal facet of primitive religion is apparent.<sup>12</sup> In his work on sacrifice and symbols, Martin Modeus says, “A meal component is one of the most common rituals features in the world.”<sup>13</sup> The animal here is a medium by which the community could become one collective, societal entity devoid of social classes or distinctions based on socio-economic background. Everyone was on the same plane. Collective communing and Durkheimian totemism exhibited around a sacred figure or religious ritual are characteristic of primitive religions such as are found in Canaan and Mesopotamia, but not so much in Israelite practice. Even though part of the Israelite sacrifice ritual included occasionally consuming part of the animal, this was by no means a primary purpose of the ritual. What then was the role of animal sacrifice in ancient Judaism? To understand this, we must analyze the pertinent passages of the Pentateuch, namely the codified, painstakingly detailed formulas for the carrying out of animal sacrifices found in the book of Leviticus and the relevant pre-Levitical narratives that deal with the different kinds of “primitive”, non-codified instances of animal sacrifices, how they were carried out, and their implications.

### **Pre-Levitical Animal Sacrifice**

Even before Moses and the formalized order of the Levitical priesthood, instances of animal sacrifices took place outside the confines of the Tabernacle and are recorded in the book of Genesis. The first illustration of animal sacrifice is found in the third chapter of Genesis after the Fall of Adam and Eve. After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Genesis 3:7)” Their sin caused them to realize their nakedness and inadequateness and they attempted

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12 Anderson, Gary A.. *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987. 21

13 Modéus, Martin. *Sacrifice and Symbol: Biblical šēlāmîm in a Ritual Perspective*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2005. 147

to cover themselves with their own resources, but later in the chapter, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)” Presumably, God did not simply create garments out of thin air to clothe Adam and Eve, so it safe to say that God was compelled to kill an animal and take its skin for garments to clothe them and save them from their nakedness, which symbolically refers to their having lost glory and grace. This is in keeping with Jewish doctrines of forgiveness as delineated in passages like Leviticus 17:11 where YHWH tells the Israelites, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” and this concept of atonement is echoed in Hebrews 9:22, “Without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin.” In this instance after the Fall of Man, God (YHWH) took the initiative and provided substitutionary, also known as 'vicarious', atonement for their sins through the killing of an animal and the shedding of its blood, thereby making the animal a vehicle for the remission of their sin by virtue of its death. Its skin then served as a covering for their nakedness and restored them to a semblance of their previous state of glory.

In Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Abel also paints a picture of the importance of animal sacrifice.

“Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor (Genesis 4:2b-5b).”

God refused to accept the offerings of Cain, the offerings of crops, but he accepted the offerings of livestock and showed favor to Abel. Animal sacrifice, and the shedding of blood, served as more suitable sacrifices than simple fruits and vegetables.

Several chapters later we find the story of Abraham and Isaac, which describes another instance of “primitive”, pre-Levitical animal sacrifice. After giving birth to a son, Isaac, in his old age, Abraham

was told by God, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you. (Genesis 22:2)”

Abraham intended to obey what God had commanded him and the rest of the narrative shows his devout submission:

“Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.’ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (Genesis 22:3-10)”

Abraham’s obedience was being tested through this instance of offering up his son but God does not allow Isaac to die at the hand of his father.

“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’ (Genesis 22:11-12)”

The ram that appeared at the conclusion of the narrative lends more evidence to the theme of vicarious atonement that is pervasive throughout the Torah. The ram took the place of Isaac under the knife of his father Abraham on the makeshift altar and died a substitutionary death. It was inevitable that blood needed to be shed to appease YHWH and the blood came instead from the ram, rather than Isaac. It is also important to note that both Abraham and Isaac went to the altar willingly. Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, and Isaac was willing to give his life. The salvific properties of the sacrifice

include the willingness of the sacrifice and/or sacrificial victim. The salvific imagery is clearly seen here in this illustration. In addition to the salvific qualities of this instance of animal sacrifice, the Israelites' unique view of their relationship with God is ostensible here as well.

“The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.’ (Genesis 22:15-18)”

Abraham's obedience brought about the birth of the nation of Israel and the establishment of a covenant, albeit an informal one, between the Israelites and YHWH.

## **Levitical Types of Animal Sacrifice**

### **1. The Burnt Offering**

The first offering to be described in Leviticus is the OLAH. The word itself means nothing more than “a going up”, and describes the manner in which the offering, through being consumed by fire, was caused to rise into the presence of God "for a sweet smelling savor. (Lv. 3:16)"<sup>14</sup> The application of the blood in the case of the OLAH was according to what is considered the standard type. Significant deviations from this norm will therefore show up only when studying the other types<sup>15</sup>. It was used as a daily rite in the Tabernacle and subsequently the Temple. It was the morning and the evening sacrifice, the solemn opening and close of daily worship. Together with other ceremonies (Ps 141:2), it was employed in connection with the daily offerings of prayer and praise, as

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14 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 128

15 Modéus, Martin. *Sacrifice and Symbol: Biblical šēlāmîm in a Ritual Perspective*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2005. 220

well as with special acts of worship on extraordinary occasions, such as Solomon's offering at the dedication of the Temple (2 Kings 8:64). It was a means by which the entire congregation could render homage to its God, but could also serve as an expression of personal devotion on the part of an individual in some memorable hour. The animal here served as a medium for devotion to YHWH and commemorating the unique covenant. On all such special occasions it served as a voluntary expression of love and reverence of a Covenant People for their God<sup>16</sup>. The act of sacrificing the animal was the ultimate expression of devotion to YHWH.

The principal features of this offering arise out of the nature of these occasions and purposes. The use of the blood was basic. These offerings were, above all, blood sacrifices for there could be no approach to God, whether in prayer or any other manner, except upon the basis of this atonement for their sins which God had given His people upon the altar<sup>17</sup>. In addition to this it was required that the animal be without blemish. Regardless of what kind of animal was brought, it had to be completely pure and lacking defects. This requirement is fully accounted for by the fact that no imperfect gift would be adequate as tribute and in worship of the perfect God. The offering must also be a total one in order to express the complete dependence of man upon his Maker, also that nothing may be withheld from God (Lv. 1:10, 22:19).

## 2. The Peace Offering

The next kind of animal sacrifice in which the use of the blood plays an essential part, is the Peace Offering, which is discussed in the third chapter of Leviticus. The Hebrew term is ZEBACH SHELAMIM. The word ZEBACH signifies a slaughtering (of an animal), either for sacrificial

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16 Zoe-Petropoulou, Maria. *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 203

17 Auerbach, Leopold. *The Babylonian Talmud in Selection*,. New York: Philosophical library, 1944. 111

purposes or for food. The word SHELEM is related to the word for “peace”<sup>18</sup>.

This ceremony was of a decidedly festive character. There were many occasions in the life of a devout Israelite or of the nation as a whole, which would justify and call for these special sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. The blessings, which had been granted by a merciful God, the help experienced in fulfilling a vow or in completing some major undertaking, would naturally call for some expression of gratefulness and rejoicing. Thus, the major part of the offerings brought by Solomon and the people at the dedication of the Temple were such SHELAMIM (1 Kings 8:63). This is also seen in 1 Samuel 11:14-15 when King Saul claims victory at Gilgal and renews his kinship with SHELAMIM. At other times the purpose might be that of entreaty, which need not necessarily be inconsistent with the festive and joyous character of these offerings since it could and should express the confident assurance of aid to come, as well as a joyful awareness of Israel's depending on YHWH<sup>19</sup>.

All this was expressed in a peculiarly vivid manner by the provisions for the consuming of the animal. The entire animal was consecrated to God, and was His in every sense of the word. Yet only certain specified parts of the animal were to be consumed by the fire upon the altar<sup>20</sup>. The remainder of the animal was to be eaten, in part by the priests, in part by the offerer, together with his family and possibly some guests. Since the entire animal had been consecrated to God, and thus formally belonged to God, this meant that the people were now the privileged guests of a Divine Host. The SHELAMIM thus became a ceremonious, communal meal, expressing the believers' conscious, undisturbed, confident enjoyment of God's favor and many blessings, including specifically the right to entreat Him for further mercies.

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18 Modéus, Martin. *Sacrifice and Symbol: Biblical šēlāmîm in a Ritual Perspective*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2005. 221

19 Anderson, Gary A.. *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987. 49

20 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 152

### 3. The Sin Offering

The Sin Offering is the CHATTATH. The meaning of the Hebrew word is simply “sin”, in the sense of erring from the appointed way or falling short of some given requirement<sup>21</sup>. Isaiah 1:18 holds forth a promise of pardon: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” The Old Testament abounds in passages and instances that make it plain that the penitent sinner shall receive the forgiveness of God for his sins and those of his household. The occasions for the use of the CHATTATH were many, ranging from an individual's desire to confess his sin to a similar provision for the entire people. It also covered a number of special occasions which called for a cleansing from previous sins, such as the consecration of priests (Ex. 29:9-14) and the festival which marked the beginning of each new month (Num. 28: 15). It culminated in the Day of the Great Atonement (Lv. 16). On this last occasion the animal offerings were very elaborate, in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion. But this elaborateness was not an essential feature of all Sin Offerings<sup>22</sup>. For the sake of the individual who was seeking the comfort of forgiveness, the animal offering could also be a most simple one. The all-important thing was that this provision for conveying the pardoning grace of God be kept constantly before the people and made available to every member.

It is in connection with the detailed description that Lv. 16 gives of the Day of Atonement that provides the most information with regard to the full significance and purpose of the various parts of the animal of the Sin Offering. The use of blood was an essential requirement in the other sacrifices also, but there it was enough that it was dashed against the sides of the altar as a general reminder of the promise which God had attached to this most important part of the entire ceremonial, (Lv. 17:11).

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21 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 170

22 Ibid. 178

In the case of the CHATTATH, however, the directives given in Lv. 4 and 5 are very specific. If it was an individual member or even a ruler of the people who was bringing the offering, the Priest was carefully to apply some of the blood to the horns of the Great Altar. Thus he was, so to speak, bringing before the very eyes of God this mute plea for forgiveness. If, on the other hand, the offering was for a High Priest who in his official capacity had erred in some part of his ministrations and thus had brought a certain measure of responsibility and guilt upon the people whose official representative he was, the blood was to be applied also to the Altar of Incense and to be sprinkled seven times before the Lord, before the veil of the sanctuary for these were the holy places where he officiated and upon which he had brought the reproach of his error. The same was to be done if the sin was one of the whole people. This last application was the pattern for the use of the animal blood on the Day of Atonement, except that there it was carried out to a far higher degree for in these instances it was for the sins of the people that the atonement was being made, the many accumulated sins. This was the great climax in the use of the animal blood upon the altars of Israel, in fact, of the entire sacrificial system. Nor can there be any doubt but that the blood ceremonial is to be considered the essential element in these sacred rites.

After this, only a secondary role may be ascribed to that part of the ceremony which describes the use of the animal flesh in the Sin Offering. The sacrificial burning remains as a constant factor in the rite<sup>23</sup>. The ceremonial eating of certain parts of the animal by the priests is also practiced, at least when the offering is brought by an individual, be he king or commoner. But a significant change appears when the CHATTATH was offered for the priest or for the nation. In these instances there is no mention of any eating of the animal, only the specific command to take the entire offering to a place outside of the camp where it was to be cleanly consumed with a bright and blazing fire<sup>24</sup>. This meant

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23 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 177

24 Ibid. 177-179

that no part of it was to be converted to any common use. Beyond that, however, this act had no special meaning. It added nothing to the sacrifice. The full significance of the Sin Offering lay in the blood that had been shed.

An interesting variant appears in the description of the ceremony by which the priest on the Day of Atonement made ready the second of the two goats for the peculiar part which he was to play in the ceremonies of the day. The laying on of hands was one of the factors which were common to the several types of animal sacrifice. It is mentioned in Lv. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4 but always in the singular: "the offerer shall lay his hand upon the head of the victim." The plural does appear in Lv 4:15, but only because a group of offerers is mentioned: "The elders of the congregation shall lay their hands..." But in Lv. 16:21 the picture changes: "Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness." The intention is clear and the sign language very drastic. The meaning which this gesture had in the other cases is here to be intensified. The symbolism of this act is further supplemented by the spoken word. The oral confession of sins, solemnly pronounced before the assembled people by their highest ranking mediator, must have made a profound impression on the assembled multitude<sup>25</sup>. But if this was true of the confession, it was equally true of the absolution which was implied when the live goat was now led away into the wilderness, "the goat, bearing upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited... (Lv. 16:22)" This act does not involve the direct slaughter of the animal but the same concept is applied. The goat was taken outside of the Tabernacle or Temple and took all the sins of the people upon itself and would then be sent off into the wilderness to die and atone for the trespasses of

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25 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 182

the Israelites. Thus their damning sins were rendered harmless.

#### 4. The Trespass Offering

The last of the blood offerings is the Trespass Offering, the ASHAM. In order to explain the difference between the Sin Offering and the ASHAM, the Trespass Offering, it has been suggested that the former pertains to sins of commission, the latter to those of omission<sup>26</sup>. In view of Lv. 5:17 this theory is untenable. It is far more in keeping to take this as referring to offenses which were of such a nature that the loss which they caused would be estimated and so covered by compensation. A careful reading of the passage in Leviticus and Numbers which refer to this offering will show that the element of restitution recurs constantly. Lv. 6:1-7 describes in detail the manner in which an offender who has defrauded his neighbor shall make amends by restoring to him what was taken, and adding 20% more. And then he shall bring his ASHAM unto the Lord, a ram without blemish. Note again, that the animal offered must be “without blemish” in order for the salvific qualities to work. In the case of an Israelite who found himself in default with regard to some of his obligations toward YHWH (Lv. 5:15), this requirement was not prescribed for the sake of compensating God, but rather constituted a measure which was wholesome and beneficial for the delinquent, as a matter of training and discipline<sup>27</sup>.

The ASHAM is called for in the ceremony of the cleansing of lepers (Lv. 14:12f), and in certain offerings by Nazarites. The possibility that the leper could not keep up with his religious obligations was very likely. Certainly no reproach was to come upon him on that score. But in the day of his recovery, he would not only remember to give thanks to God, but also go as far as his means permitted in bringing a token offering as compensation for his accumulated debts in his duties toward his Lord.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 171

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, Gary A.. *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987. 82

Note that the "amends" are not called for in this instance. The Nazarite was to bring an ASHAM only if during the days of his vow he had become ceremonially defiled, and therefore temporarily disqualified for the special service to God which was specified by his vow. It was an acknowledgment that some days had been lost which belonged to God and were consecrated to Him (Num. 6:12). YHWH did not profit thereby but the Nazarite himself was further trained and exercised in the conscientious fulfilling of his solemn pledge. "Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the most High" (Ps. 50:14). "The basic idea of the Sin Offering is the *expiatio*, and of the Trespass Offering, the *satisfactio*; in the former case the evangelical character prevails, in the latter the disciplinary."<sup>28</sup> The animal here is used for ceremonial cleansing of the physical self, in addition to the spiritual self. The death of the animal was not only achieving atonement for the individual, but it provided ceremonial cleansing by washing away the defilements.

In addition to all the special provisions for the restitution of what had been withheld from God or taken from the neighbor, the offering of a sacrificial animal still remained, and that the normal use of the blood was observed. This clearly demonstrated that material restitution and compensation, even in excess of the offense, did not remove the moral wrong, the offense against the holy will of YHWH. An atonement was still needed for that, and could be supplied only by the means which YHWH had established for that purpose: the sacrificial blood.

In the case of the Trespass Offering it was normal procedure that part of the animal flesh was eaten by the priests. "Every male among the priests shall eat thereof" (Lv. 7:6). By this ordinance God was acknowledging the Levitical priesthood as truly representing Him, so that He received these offerings through them as well as directly by means of the ceremonial burning<sup>29</sup>.

In Judaism, as theologically portrayed in the Old Testament, sacrifices were used as a means of

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28 Oehler, Gust. Fr., and George Edward Day. *Theology of the Old Testament*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883. 407

29 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 173

a payment for man's sins. The sacrificial order was instituted by God as a means whereby He could preserve His absolute holiness, which required that all sin be punished; and show loving mercy to mankind.

### **The Sacrifice Ritual**

With regard to the nature of the sacrificial victim, unless it were the requirement that there be an animal, and that it be without blemish. The approved list runs from the powerful bullock down to a shrinking pair of turtle doves. A further bit of consideration for the poor was shown when they were permitted to bring as little as a tenth of an Ephah of meal (Lv. 5:11). After this, however, there follow a number of steps in which a striking similarity runs through each of the several types of sacrifices under discussion. They are:

- a) the Presentation
- b) the Laying on of Hands
- c) the Slaughtering
- d) the Use of the Blood
- e) the Consuming of the Flesh (after flaying and dissection)

In the case of d) and e) certain variations occur within the action which shall be noted later. But in each case the action itself is the same.

The formal act of the presentation of the animal took place at the door of the Tabernacle (Lv. 1:3). It involved an examination of the animal to determine whether it met with the ceremonial requirements. The presence of these animals in the Court of the Temple would seem to indicate that they had been previously examined, and were now offered for sale to the worshipers as "certified

stock." Because of this examination the act of presentation cannot be considered a part of the sacrificial action proper, since it would always be possible that the intended animal might have to be rejected. Presumably the offerer would soon appear with another animal to carry out his original intention. In all other respects, this part of the ceremony is certainly filled with sacrificial implications. The animal is called by the solemn liturgical name of QORBAN, which is simply a generic term for "sacred presentations"<sup>30</sup>. The injunction, "He shall offer it of his own voluntary will" (Lv. 1:3) points to the quality of conscious, active surrender to God like that displayed by Abraham and Isaac, which is an essential element of any offering which should be pleasing to Him. But in one respect this voluntary quality, essential though it was, could not possibly express the true situation existing between the offerer and his God. It could not give adequate expression to the fact that because of man's sin his life was forfeit. For this purpose the silent animal had to serve, by dying as the substitute, that the offerer might live. But the death of this animal was incomplete, too, for in this passive role the voluntary element is necessarily missing. The combination of the willingness of the offerer and the death of the sacrificial animal, served to complete the ritual<sup>31</sup>. This alone was the perfect presentation, an animal without blemish.

The next part of the ceremony of sacrifice was the peculiarly impressive laying on of hands. It is carefully prescribed in connection with every offering but the Trespass Offering. The usual form was that the offerer would lay his hands upon the head of the animal. The ceremony was made doubly impressive when on the Day of Atonement (YOM KIPPUR) the High Priest placed both hands upon the head of the Scapegoat and confessed over him all the sins of the Children of Israel, and all their

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30 Modéus, Martin. *Sacrifice and Symbol: Biblical šēlāmîm in a Ritual Perspective*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2005. 166

31 Yerkes, Royden Keith. *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. New York: Scribner, 1952. 49

transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat (Lv. 16:21). This leaves no doubt as to the significance of this action in connection with the Sin Offering. By this action the offerer would then be dedicating his animal to God, and making it the vehicle of the particular thought that was uppermost in his heart and which constituted the specific purpose of his offering, be it worship, prayer, thanksgiving, or perhaps a particular confession of sin<sup>32</sup>.

The ceremonial slaughtering of the sacrificial animal is designated by the word SHACHAT, (putting to death)<sup>33</sup>. As in the case of the previous actions (presentation, laying on of hands), so this function was as a rule performed by the offerer himself. Exceptions occurred when this was done by the High Priest on behalf of the people at large (Day of Atonement) or when the priests brought the standing animal offerings of worship and prayer which were repeated each day. It might seem that the SHACHAT was a purely functional act, needed to secure the blood for the subsequent rite, and that it had no significance of its own, perhaps as picturing the punishment by which satisfaction is made for sin. But if we note that the blood is accepted as an atonement "because the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lv. 17:11), then one cannot escape the conclusion that a broader significance is to be attached to the death of the animal which has already been designated as the accepted substitute for the one who is bringing the animal.

The next step in the solemn sacrificial rite was the use of the blood. The manner of doing this was by no means uniform, but was most carefully prescribed for each particular occasion. Sometimes the blood was to be poured out from a vessel against the four sides of the Great Altar, and this with considerable vigor, sometimes it was sprinkled with the fingers. On certain occasions it was applied to the horns of the altar, on others poured out in great quantity at the foot of the altar. Another variant was

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32 Ibid. 134

33 Ibid. 147

the manner in which the blood of the doves was caused to spurt against the sides of the altar (Lv. 1:15). But regardless of how much difference there was in these matters of detail, the constant factor remains that the blood was always to be used (with exception to the Meal Offering which was comprised of cereal gifts). Whenever these people came before their God, whether in solemn worship, in joyful praise, or in mournful confession, there was always enacted before their eyes the shedding of that animal blood which God had given them upon the altar for an atonement for their souls.

Not only was this the obvious climax of the sacrificial rite, but it was also clearly an indispensable part of it. In noting its significance we come to the very heart of the entire institution of blood sacrifices. Concerning this use of the blood YHWH had told His people (Lv. 17:11) : "I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your soul." Like a protecting shield this blood was to come between these lives that because of sin were subject to death, and the just vengeance of their God. Its mute appeal was to be a constant plea for pardon, and its price, namely the life which had been yielded in the shedding of this blood, was to render full satisfaction for the enormous debt which had been incurred. This was the way of the Atonement, of reconciliation, without which no true Israelite who was conscious of the holiness of YHWH could venture to come into His presence.

## **Conclusion**

Animal Sacrifice for the Ancient Israelites was primarily comprised of the vertical aspect, not in that it served to feed YHWH or give gifts to Him in order to placate Him, but in that it served to give them a unique relationship with their God. Mary Zoe-Petropoulou writes, "Jewish sacrificial ritual encapsulated values of a religious and national character. For Jews, God (YHWH) had made a covenant with Israel, the ritual part of which consisted in obligations of both on the nation as a whole,

and on each of its members.”<sup>34</sup> But not only that, animal sacrifice served as a medium for atonement and propitiation of sins. Thus, animal sacrifice allowed the Israelites to keep their covenant with YHWH and attain a certain spiritual relationship with God and it also achieved salvific purposes, as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Zoe-Petropoulou, Maria. *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 203

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