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# The Cross in the Shadows

*“Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. He shall slay the young bull before the Lord; and Aaron’s sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”’” (Leviticus 1:1–5).*

The Book of Leviticus has been called “A Handbook for the Priests.” The Talmud called it “The Law of the Priests.” The English title “Leviticus” is taken from the Latin Vulgate translation and means “According to the Levites.” It is a misleading title in the sense that the book is more about what the priests were to do in God’s service than about what the Levites were to do. The Levites, as a separate group from the priests, are mentioned only one time in the book (Leviticus 25:32, 33), while the priests are addressed more than two hundred times.

This book is a detailed expression of how the ancient Israelites were to come to God through a divine cleansing from their sins (chs. 1–16) and how they were to remain with God through continual cleansing, which would give them the opportunity to have true, abiding fellowship with Him (chs. 17–27).

The Book of Hebrews says that God did not take “pleasure” in these sacrifices, but He required them because they were necessary for the spiritual life of His people. Jesus is pictured in Hebrews as saying, “In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure” (Hebrews 10:6).

One can only imagine the endless parade of people during Old Testament times coming to the Tabernacle and later to the temple with their sacrifices in order to attain a proper relationship with God and in order to maintain and celebrate this proper spiritual relationship.

Of particular interest to the Christian are the words of Hebrews 10:1–4:

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Two truths stand out in this passage. First, the term “shadow” is used. All that we see in the Law formed a kind of preview of the reality that was to come. Second, there is the word “never.” The affirmation is made that the sacrifices could “never” atone for sin. Had they been able to do so, they would still be a part of the activities of God’s people. They only fulfilled a temporary service: “In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year” (Hebrews 10:3).

Every Old Testament animal sacrifice foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus. Animal sacrifices, as a temporary solution to a permanent problem, pointed to the cross, God’s permanent solution to the guilt of sin. We are told, “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet” (Hebrews 10:11–13).

These Old Testament sacrifices, though temporary, forecasted characteristics of the com-

plete sacrifice of Jesus that we must not miss. In the shadows of these Old Testament sacrifices we see the characteristics of the cross.

*They contained the principle of identification.* This fact was vividly conveyed to the worshiper, for he was required by the Law to lay his hand on the head of the animal that was being offered for him. He watched at close range the exchanging of an animal life for his. The Law said, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. He shall slay the young bull before the Lord" (Leviticus 1:4, 5a).

The same principle of identification is evident in every part of Christ's death. Paul expressed it in the words, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

Can you imagine how personal and vivid this identification was to the Old Testament worshiper? I have never enjoyed watching an animal being slaughtered. For that reason, I am not much of a deer hunter. When I killed my first deer, I knew that deer hunting would not be my favorite pastime. I am not alone. Who of us likes to see an animal die? Be honest! Every time I discuss the sacrifices of the Old Testament in my classes I get the same type of response—a flinching among my students coupled with revelations that their stomachs are turning. Sacrifices involve death and blood, and that is why we cringe at the thought of Jesus dying for us. He was our atoning sacrifice, even as the Old Testament animals were the atoning sacrifices for the worshipers.

*The Old Testament sacrifices contained, to a limited degree, the principle of propitiation.* The wrath of God concerning sin would be appeased temporarily by the animal sacrifices. Leviticus says, "Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, and the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar, on the offerings by fire to the Lord. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin which he has committed, and he will be forgiven" (Leviticus 4:35; see vv. 26, 31). The forgiveness seems to be an actual forgiveness that remained dependent upon continual sacrifices. The writer

of Hebrews said, "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:3, 4).

Jesus, according to John, became the complete appeasement for the wrath of God concerning sin: "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). His atonement went backward as well as forward: "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

*These sacrifices contained the principle of obedience.* The priests were given specific instructions in Leviticus on how each sacrifice was to be offered, what type of sacrifice was to be brought, and what part of the animal was to be laid upon the altar. Through the Holy Spirit, both the priest and worshiper were guided through the process of offering these blood sacrifices to God.

Concerning the final sacrifice, our Lord's death at the cross, obedience was necessitated. Jesus had to manifest it (Philippians 2:5–8), and we have to exhibit obedience in our response to it. Jesus said, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

As we meditate upon our Lord's death, we gain insights into the nature of it by reviewing the sacrifices that were offered continually in the Old Testament times. Lurking in the shadows of those sacrifices are distinct characteristics that Jesus had, as He became our sacrifice for sin. These sacrifices required identification, propitiation, and obedience, and as such, they foreshadowed the greatest of all sacrifices, the sacrifice for sin that was made by Jesus. He died for sin, for us, and for the fulfillment of God's will!

Eddie Cloer



*"Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can*

*never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:11–14).*

*“How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple” (Psalm 65:4).*