

# THE PROBLEM OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES IN EZEKIEL 40–48

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One of the most difficult passages to harmonize with dispensational literalism is Ezekiel 40–48.<sup>1</sup> In these chapters Ezekiel recorded a vision of a new temple in which sacrificial ritual occurred. This immediately places the dispensationalist in a dilemma. If the temple is viewed as in the eschaton<sup>2</sup> and the sacrifices are literal, then this seems to be at odds with the Book of Hebrews, which clearly states that Christ's sacrifice has put an end to all sacrifice. If, on the other hand, the sacrifices are not accepted as literal, this seems to oppose one of the cornerstones of dispensationalism, namely, the normal interpretation of prophetic literature.

With the exception of Peters,<sup>3</sup> most dispensationalists have

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<sup>1</sup> Dispensationalists have wrongly been put on the defensive regarding this passage. Nondispensationalists have as much difficulty harmonizing this passage with their theological schemes, for if they reject a literal interpretation of these chapters, they are unable to offer any real exegesis of the texts. Beasley-Murray explains, "To tackle the vision verse by verse and try to take symbolically thirteen cubits, hooks a handbreadth long, the sixth part of an ephah, place names like Berothai and Hauran, is out of the question, to contradict all reason" (G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Ezekiel," in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. Donald Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, 3d ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 663).

<sup>2</sup> It is not within the scope of this article to offer a critique of the views regarding when Ezekiel's temple will be realized. For a discussion of the various options, see the writer's dissertation, "A Proposed Solution to the Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993), 14–38. The temple, it is believed, will be in the millennium because of (a) the supernatural elements in the passage, (b) the nonexistence of Ezekiel's temple in history, (c) the land promises presented by Ezekiel, (d) the emphasis on the temple as the immediate dwelling place of God, (e) the differences between Ezekiel's scheme and the sanctuaries of Moses, Solomon, and Zerubbabel, (f) the provenance of Ezekiel 40–48 as a salvation oracle, and (g) parallel ideas found in the other prophets.

<sup>3</sup> In G. N. H. Peters's massive work on premillennialism and the literal interpretation of prophecy, he concluded that when Ezekiel spoke of sacrifices he was using a *hyocatastasis* figure of speech (*The Theocratic Kingdom*, 3 vols. [reprint,

explained the sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48 through what is known as “the memorial view.”<sup>4</sup> According to this view the sacrifices offered during the earthly reign of Christ will be visible reminders of His work on the cross. Thus these sacrifices will not contradict the clear teaching of Hebrews, for they will not have any efficacy except to memorialize Christ’s death. The primary support for this view is the parallel of the Lord’s Supper. It is argued that just as the communion table looks back on the Cross without besmirching its glory, so millennial sacrifices will do the same.

On the surface this solution seems to solve the problem. However, a number of objections can be raised against it. First, Ezekiel nowhere stated or even hinted at the idea that these sacrifices will be memorial in nature. Second, Ezekiel specifically wrote that these offerings will make atonement (45:15, 17, 20). The word for “atonement” in Ezekiel is the same as the word used in Leviticus. Third, the parallel between sacrifices and the Lord’s Supper intimates that animal sacrifices had no efficacy whatsoever.

In light of the weaknesses of the memorial view, critics of dispensationalism have been quick to bring up the problem of Ezekiel 40–48. Crenshaw affirms that “the passage most commonly mentioned that represents great difficulty to dispensational literalism is Ezekiel’s temple vision.”<sup>5</sup> Hamilton remarks that “the restoration of the whole sacrificial system seems to dishonor the sacrifice of Christ. . . . According to a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40–48 the whole ceremonial law is to be again set up in Israel.”<sup>6</sup> Hughes even states that “to restore all these today . . . would be apostasy.”<sup>7</sup> And Allis, in his classic

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Grand Rapids Kregel, 1952]) Unfortunately, however, Peters contravened the literalism he sought to defend, by inserting a figure of speech in a passage immersed in literal language where no figure is demanded

<sup>4</sup> See for example A C Gaebelein, *The Prophet Ezekiel* (Wheaton, IL Victor, 1986), 312, John L Mitchell, “The Question of Millennial Sacrifices,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110 (October–December 1953) 345, Charles C Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL Victor, 1986), 510, Adolph Saphir, *Christ and Israel* (London Morgan and Scott, 1911), 182, J D Pentecost, *Things To Come* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1958), 510, Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago Moody, 1969), 234, Erich Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1952), 156, Gleason L Archer Jr, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev ed (Chicago Moody, 1974), 383, Ralph H Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1986), 6 950–51, and Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago Moody, 1968), 250

<sup>5</sup> Curtis Crenshaw, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Memphis Footstool, 1989), 238

<sup>6</sup> Floyd Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1942), 40, 42

<sup>7</sup> Archibald Hughes, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (London Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1958), 157

work in which he attacks dispensationalism, supplies his assessment of the problem.

It is true that the Old Testament predictions of the restoration of the temple and of the Mosaic ceremonial law have occasioned them no little embarrassment. . . . Literally interpreted, this means the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood and of the Mosaic ritual of sacrifices . . . The author to the Hebrews warns his readers most earnestly against returning to this system which has been done away<sup>8</sup>

This article suggests a different solution to this problem, a solution that maintains dispensational distinctives, deals honestly with the text of Ezekiel, and in no way demeans the work Christ did on the cross. This study suggests that animal sacrifices during the millennium will serve primarily to remove ceremonial uncleanness and prevent defilement from polluting the temple envisioned by Ezekiel. This will be necessary because the glorious presence of Yahweh will once again be dwelling on earth in the midst of a sinful and unclean people.

### THE ISSUE OF כִּפָּר

Since atonement is one of the primary purposes of sacrifice, it is necessary to determine the meaning and usage of כִּפָּר. Also it is important to examine the word in order to deal honestly with the text of Ezekiel.

#### THE COVER VIEW (ARABIC ROOT)

Traditionally scholars have taken כִּפָּר to mean "to cover over," connecting כִּפָּר with an Arabic verb.<sup>9</sup> The idea is that sins are covered over by the blood, thereby hiding the offenses from God's view so that He does not exact punishment for them. The theological deduction of this view is that the Old Testament ritual merely covered sins until they were dealt with by the atonement of Christ. However, when the word is examined, it will be seen that another meaning better fits the way the word is used.

<sup>8</sup> Oswald Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 2d ed (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947), 243, 246-47. Also see John B. Taylor, who states that dispensationalists have misinterpreted the significance of Christ's salvation (*Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969], 252-53).

<sup>9</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 497; Johann H. Kurtz, *Sacificial Worship of the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: Clark, 1863), 67; Ludwig H. Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 452; A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1906), 320-21.

## THE RANSOM/PROPTIATION VIEW

A second view is based on the noun כֶּפֶר. This view has been championed by Morris, who stated that “to make atonement means to avert punishment, especially the divine anger, by the payment of a כֶּפֶר, a ransom, which may be of money or which may be of life.”<sup>10</sup> Thus Morris sees the verb כִּפַּר as meaning to avert punishment by the payment of a כֶּפֶר, with the dominant idea of the verb כִּפַּר being propitiation.

This position is supported by the fact that the word is used to refer to the anger of individuals (Gen. 32:20; Prov. 16:14) and of God (Num. 16:41-50; 25:11-13). Thus Judisch suggests that “the common meaning of *kpr* is to propitiate someone or to placate wrath aroused by an offense.”<sup>11</sup> These proponents also note that כֶּפֶר is normally translated by ἱλαως in the Septuagint.<sup>12</sup>

There is no denying the fact that in the כִּפַּר-act divine wrath and the payment of a כֶּפֶר is present. However, this explanation does not take into account a great number of the usages in Leviticus, as well as the syntax of כִּפַּר and its synonyms.

## THE ERASE/WIPE AWAY/PURGE VIEW (AKKADIAN ROOT)

This view of כִּפַּר comes from its Akkadian cognate *kuppuru*, which means “to wipe off” or “to purify.”<sup>13</sup> Noordtzij states this view: “If I understand correctly, *kipper* contains the idea of cleansing by means of sweeping away.”<sup>14</sup> Steinmueller writes that atonement is “legal purification or divine pardon so that an

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 166, and idem, “Atonement,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 97

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Judisch, “Propitiation in the Old Testament,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48 (1984): 223

<sup>12</sup> H. G. Link, “ἱλᾶσθαι,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:149, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 375, Judisch, “Propitiation in the Old Testament,” 224, and George Smeaton, *The Apostle’s Doctrine of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 455

<sup>13</sup> *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of Chicago*, s.v. “kaporu,” 8:178-80. Wright presents this significant conclusion: “The ritual action . . . is a purification rite performed by wiping . . . The overwhelming majority of cases shows that this wiping rite was eliminatory in purpose, wiping materials which have contracted the impurity were thrown away” (David Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1987], 298). Wright’s phrase “this wiping rite was eliminatory in purpose” has significant ramifications for the proposal made in this article.

<sup>14</sup> Aril Noordtzij, *Leviticus*, trans. Raymond Tegtman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 33.

Israelite could approach again with good conscience the Tabernacle . . . Yahweh's dwelling place."<sup>15</sup>

One support for the meaning of "wipe away" or "purge" is that in Leviticus God is never the direct object of the כפר-act. In nearly 50 references to כפר, the object toward which atonement is made is either a person (though indirectly) or an inanimate object. Thus the act of atonement does something to the person or object rather than to God.<sup>16</sup> "This atonement . . . is not an action exercised on God. Rather it is directed to the person or to the object which has become impure. . . . What the sacrifice accomplished is the removal of the impurity and the restoration of union with God."<sup>17</sup>

Another support for this view comes from terms related to כפר. For example in Leviticus 16:30 the purpose of the כפר-act is to purify the people (cf. Num. 8:21; Ezek. 43:26).

What has been surprisingly inadequate in all of these investigations seems to be the most fundamental inquiry into the alleged synonyms of *kipper* and terms related to it. *Kipper* expresses some act which enables progression from uncleanness to cleanness, from cleanness to holiness and from uncleanness to holiness.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE OBJECT OF כפר

Milgrom has argued convincingly that a person is never the direct object of the כפר rite but only the beneficiary (thus the indirect object).<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, he says, various sacred objects (*sancta*) are the direct object of כפר. Milgrom bases this observation on two facts. The first is the prepositions used with כפר. He

<sup>15</sup> J. E. Steinmueller, "Sacrificial Blood in the Bible," *Biblica* 40 (1959) 561. Also see Megory Anderson, "The Inadequacy of the Christian Doctrine of Atonement," *Anglican Theological Review* 68 (1986) 315; Godfrey Ashby, *Sacrifice Its Nature and Purpose* (London: SCM, 1988), 33; George B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament Its Theory and Practice* (New York: KTAV, 1971), 67-73; G. R. Driver, "Three Technical Terms in the Pentateuch," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956) 34-38; Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 56-57, 59; and Bernard J. Bamberger, *Leviticus* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 162.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously sin and uncleanness are inimical to Yahweh, and in this sense He is a causative factor in atonement. But His propitiation is only an effect of atonement, while the "atoning" is doing something to the object, namely, cleansing it.

<sup>17</sup> John Donahue, "Sin and Sacrifice: Reflections on Leviticus," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 141 (1959) 8, 10. See also Stanislas Lyonnet and Leopold Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 122; and Raymond Abba, "The Origin and Significance of Hebrew Sacrifice," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 7 (1977) 1323.

<sup>18</sup> N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 94, 97-98.

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976) 391; and idem, "A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17:11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971) 150-51.

has shown that whenever the object of כפר is a person, a preposition must follow, either על or בעד, both of which signify “on behalf of, for” (e.g., Lev. 16:6, 24, 30, 33). When the object is nonhuman, כפר takes the preposition על or ב or a direct object (e.g., Lev. 16:16, 20).

The second fact supporting Milgrom’s thesis is the ritual of the primary purification offering, the חטאת. As will be shown later, this offering is always applied to objects for their purgation, and never to people. Thus the priest purified sacred areas on behalf of the person who caused them to become contaminated. The offender then needed forgiveness “not because of his act per se . . . but because of the consequences of his act.”<sup>20</sup>

#### THE USAGE OF כפר IN EZEKIEL

It has been seen so far that כפר functioned to cleanse or purify objects contaminated by sin or uncleanness or to make כפר on behalf of persons. This act of purgation propitiated Yahweh, thus enabling Him to dwell among His people. From the usage of the word in Ezekiel 40–48 (43:20, 26; 45:15, 17, 20), a number of points may be made regarding the function of כפר in Ezekiel’s temple.

First, the one presenting the offering is a human. Since this will take place in a future temple and since God will not be the subject of the activity, this suggests that something on a more temporal and finite level will occur.<sup>21</sup> Second, in three of the five instances where כפר is used by Ezekiel, the object of the atonement is inanimate. The significance of this point will be elucidated in the following section on impurity. Third, the purpose of the atonement will be to cleanse or purify. Concerning the words used, Greenberg makes this point.

This is done by purgation and whole offerings whose function is to *kipper* (purge), *hitte’* (decontaminate), and *tihher* (purify), the altar so as to make it fit for the regular worship (43 20, 22, 26) These rites have to do with the very ancient idea that all pollutions contaminated the sanctuary<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 256. Atonement in the Old Testament was made on behalf of people but never directly applied to them. On the other hand the blood of Christ provides direct, internal cleansing of the individual. For further validation of this, see the present writer’s listing of every occurrence of כפר in Leviticus in which the occasion, subject, object, and purpose of the rite is chronicled (Hullinger, “A Proposed Solution to the Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48,” 48–52). Strikingly, whenever the psalmists or prophets referred to moral purification, they never used the term כפר. Instead they used terms that signify cleansing with water (Ps. 51:2, Isa. 1:16, Ezek. 36:25, Zech. 13:1).

<sup>21</sup> This statement suggests that future animal sacrifices will deal not with eternal salvific matters, but with finite cleansing of impurities. In soteriological matters only God could be the subject of the work.

<sup>22</sup> Moshe Greenberg, “The Design and Themes of Ezekiel’s Program of Restoration,” *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 194.

This idea of cleansing, purgation, or decontamination is valid when each of the five references to כֶּפֶר in Ezekiel 40–48 is examined. This demonstrates that the function of כֶּפֶר in Leviticus is sustained in Ezekiel.

### THE PROBLEM OF IMPURITY

This atonement cleansing was necessary in Leviticus because of the descent of the Shekinah in Exodus 40. A holy God had taken up residence in the midst of a sinful and unclean people. Similarly Ezekiel foresaw the return of God's glory to the millennial temple. This will again create a tension between a holy God and an unclean people. The important point to be kept in mind is that uncleanness was treated as a contagion that had to be washed away lest it cause defilement. Quite often things such as animals (Lev. 11), childbirth (Lev. 12), swellings and eruptions (Lev. 13–14), sexual misdeeds (Lev. 18), and corpses (Lev. 21) could cause one to be unclean.<sup>23</sup> Because many of the causes of uncleanness are not associated with ethics, every person at one time or another in his life would be in a state of uncleanness.

### THE CONTAGIOUS NATURE OF IMPURITY

This uncleanness could be spread by contact even to the point that it would penetrate the tabernacle, thereby causing it to be defiled.<sup>24</sup> This is why it was imperative that the unclean and holy not meet (Lev. 7:20–21; 22:3). In the middle of Israel's camp stood the tabernacle—the presence of God. Thus Moses was commanded to “send away from the camp anyone who has an infec-

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<sup>23</sup> The question of what makes something clean or unclean has always been puzzling. Of the myriad of solutions to this enigma, perhaps the best is that suggested by Wenham. He has modified Mary Douglas's famous holiness/uncleanness contrast (Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* [London: Routledge & Paul, 1966], 53, 57) from being an opposition between normality and abnormality to a contrast between life and death (Gordon J. Wenham, “Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev. 19:18)?” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95 [1983]: 432–34). Before Wenham, this view was proposed by Emanuel Feldman (*Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law as Theology* [New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977]).

<sup>24</sup> Penetration of pollution into the sancta seems to be varied in its effect, and various types had differing degrees of ability to penetrate further into the tabernacle. First, the individual's inadvertent sin or severe uncleanness polluted the outer altar (Lev. 4:25, 30, 9:9). This is why in this instance only the courtyard altar was daubed with blood. Second, when the high priest or the entire community sinned or was unclean, blood had to be applied on the inner altar as well as before the veil (4:5–7, 16–18). This would be necessary because the route to this sacred section of the sanctuary was vulnerable because it was traversed by the high priest. Third, rebellious sin seems to have defiled the holy place, which was purified on the Day of Atonement (16:16–19). Thus the severity of the pollution varied in direct relation to the depth of its penetration into the sanctuary.

tious skin disease or a discharge of any kind. . . . Send away male and female alike; send them outside the camp so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them" (Num. 5:2-3, NIV). The neglect of these rules polluted the tabernacle and led to the death of the offender (19:13, 20). "Uncleanness, once contracted, takes on a life of its own, as an invisible yet physical substance, impurity . . . seeks out contact with holiness, and once holiness has been attacked, it becomes contaminated by the impurity which remains stuck to it like barnacles on a ship."<sup>25</sup>

To further illustrate the communicable danger of impurities, one thinks of the Levitical law concerning the menstruant.<sup>26</sup> A clean person who touched a menstruant became unclean until evening. A man who had intercourse with a menstruant acquired her impurity to the same degree and was unclean for seven days. In addition, whatever a menstruant would lie or sit on became unclean, and the person who touched her bed or chair became unclean. The woman who had just given birth was considered unclean in a way similar to that of the menstruant. After a period of uncleanness the woman was to bring the priest a burnt offering and a sin offering to "make atonement for her," and then she would be "ceremonially clean" (Lev. 12:7).

Another example has to do with a person who came into contact with a corpse<sup>27</sup> by touching it directly. That person became unclean for seven days. Significantly the person who was contaminated was in danger of defiling the tabernacle (Num. 19:13) and was to be cut off until he was cleansed (v. 20). Again, anyone who was suspected of having an infectious skin disease<sup>28</sup> was to be shut up for seven days to determine if he was infected. After the person recovered from the disease, he or she was to undergo purification rites including laundering, bathing, and offerings.

The impurities that were communicable and thus endangered the community were not always due to sin, but simply to the human condition, and they therefore required a blood sacrifice. Furthermore, while the legislation was included in the Mosaic Law, its theological basis goes beyond the Law for it was based on the Person of God.

There is more behind the restriction of communicably impure per-

<sup>25</sup> Megory Anderson and Philip Culbertson, "The Inadequacy of the Christian Doctrine of Atonement," *Anglican Theological Review* 68 (1986) 309

<sup>26</sup> Leviticus 12 2, 5, 15 19-26, 33, 18 19, 20 18, 2 Samuel 11 4, Isaiah 30 22, Ezekiel 7 19-20, 18 6, 22 10, 36 17

<sup>27</sup> Leviticus 10 4-5, Numbers 5 2-3, 6 6-12, 9 6-14, 19, 31 13-24, Isaiah 65 4, Ezekiel 39 11-16, 43 7-9

<sup>28</sup> Leviticus 13, 14, 22 4, Numbers 5 2-3, 12 10-15, Deuteronomy 24 8, 2 Kings 7 3-10, 15 5



sons and things from the profane sphere than a mere social aversion to impurity. Indeed, underlying this entire phenomenon is ultimately a theological concern. If communicably impure persons and objects were allowed full access to the community, other persons and objects would become contaminated. This would in turn threaten cultic matters. With severe impurities running loose, the average impurity of the community would increase, causing a greater chance of defiling sancta.<sup>29</sup>

#### THE CURE FOR IMPURITY

Since being unclean would eventually lead to death or God's judgment, there had to be a way for the unclean to become clean. This method included cleansing with water, quarantine, or atonement with sacrificial blood. As Wenham observed,

Anything that disrupted this order, e.g., death, disease, or sin, was a potential threat to the whole community, and sacrifice was the principal means for remedying the disruption and restoring harmony into the community. . . . In Leviticus, sacrifice . . . is regularly associated with cleansing and sanctification. . . . Sacrificial blood is necessary to cleanse and sanctify.<sup>30</sup>

Thus it can be seen that worship was restricted because of impurities. These impurities will be an issue in the millennial temple, and the issue is related to the divine presence and not to the Mosaic Law as such. So it will be necessary to renew some type of cleansing during the kingdom period.

#### A HARMONIZATION OF EZEKIEL 40–48 AND HEBREWS 9–10

How does the fact of animal sacrifices being offered in a literal temple in the future millennium, as taught in Ezekiel 40–48, harmonize with the clear assertion made by the author of Hebrews regarding the finality of Christ's offering? The key passage in this regard is Hebrews 9:9–14.

One of the weaknesses of the Levitical system was that it could not perfect<sup>31</sup> the conscience. While Paul described the conscience as a moral faculty of judgment,<sup>32</sup> the writer to the He-

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 227–28. As an addendum to Wright's statement, it could be said that the defiling of sancta would necessitate either judgment by God or the removal of God's presence.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 26.

<sup>31</sup> "Perfect" in Hebrews has acquired a technical meaning from the Septuagint in which it signifies an inward fitness to approach God. For validation of this point, see Gerhard Delling, "τέλος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 8:79–86; Moisés Silva, "Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (1976): 61; and P. J. du Plessis, *ΤΕΛΕΙΟΣ The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 230.

<sup>32</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 477.

brews said the conscience reminds the believer of past sins.<sup>33</sup> The writer of Hebrews pointed out that the internal awareness of sin (i.e., the conscience) was never permanently cleansed by animal sacrifices. Thus the old system, because it was primarily ceremonial, could not resolve the problem of a guilty conscience. For this reason the much greater sacrifice of Christ was necessary.

Hebrews 9:10 and 13 state that the Levitical offerings were related to “food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body,” and the sprinkling of blood so as to sanctify and purify the flesh. Animal sacrifices were efficacious in removing ceremonial uncleanness. While Christ is superior, the fact should not be lost that animal sacrifices did in the earthly sphere cleanse the flesh and remove outward defilement.

*Σάρξ* (“flesh”) and *συνείδησις* (“conscience”) constitute the two sides of human existence for the author of Hebrews.<sup>34</sup> The earthly side of “flesh” could be cleansed by the earthly Levitical system, whereas the “conscience” side of human existence required a superior sacrifice. The blood of bulls and goats purified the flesh (Heb. 9:13) but it could not perfect the conscience since it dealt only with external cleansing (9:9-10).

Hebrews reveals that Christ’s death met certain objectives and operated in a sphere different from that of the animal sacrifices of the old economy. Hebrews states that animal sacrifices were efficacious in the sphere of ceremonial cleansing. They were not efficacious, however, in the realm of conscience and therefore in the matter of spiritual salvation. Because of this, Christ’s offering is superior in that it accomplished something the Levitical offerings never could, namely, soteriological benefits.

Only Christ’s sacrifice was of the kind that could form the basis for eternal and spiritual salvation. But this in no way refutes the . . . efficacy in the Old Testament sacrifices. . . . Eternal or spiritual salvation was not the issue. Therefore, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament were effective at their own respective and totally different levels.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gary Selby, “The Meaning and Function of *συνείδησις* in Hebrews 9 and 10,” *Restoration Quarterly* 28 (1985/86) 147; William Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas, TX Word, 1991), 225, C A Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament* (London SCM, 1955), 108, and Theodore H Robinson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York Harper and Brothers, 1933), 123

<sup>34</sup> James Thompson, “Hebrews 9 and Hellenistic Concepts of Sacrifice,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1976) 572

<sup>35</sup> Richard E Averbeck, “An Exegetical Study of Leviticus 1 4 with a Discussion of the Nature of Old Testament Atonement” (M Div thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), 68

## CONCLUSION

Ezekiel 40-48 indicates that during the millennium God's glory will return to the temple where sacrificial ritual will take place and in which offerings<sup>36</sup> will make atonement. For Ezekiel the concept of atonement is the same as it was in the Book of Leviticus, namely, an act that wipes away and purges uncleanness.

This purgation will be required because the divine presence will once again be dwelling in the land. As argued earlier, impurity is contagious to both persons and sancta. Further, impurity is inimical to Yahweh, who refuses to dwell among a people if uncleanness remains untreated. Because of God's promise to dwell on earth during the millennium (as stated in the New Covenant), it is necessary that He protect His presence through sacrifice.

This function of sacrifices, according to the Book of Hebrews, is efficacious. However, this was never the purpose of Christ's sacrifice, for it dealt with the internal cleansing of the conscience. Therefore the two are harmonious. It should be further added that this sacrificial system will be a temporary one in that the millennium (with its partial population of unglorified humanity) will last only one thousand years. During the eternal state all inhabitants of the New Jerusalem will be glorified and will therefore not be a source of contagious impurities to defile the holiness of Yahweh.

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<sup>36</sup> Ezekiel specifically mentioned the burnt, cereal, peace, sin (or purgation), and reparation offerings as functioning in the millennial temple. Though this article has focused on atonement in the millennium, nothing in these offerings will contradict Christ's work on the cross. In addition to providing atonement, these offerings served to ascribe worship and thanksgiving to God and to provide reparation for misappropriating sancta or defrauding one's fellowman. None of these functions is inconsistent with the Cross. In fact the major atonement offering (חטאת) was required on occasions when contamination was involuntary such as childbirth (Lev 12 1-8), unclean discharges (Lev 15 13-15, 25-30), leprosy (Lev 14), and the defilement of a Nazirite (Num 6 11). Milgrom has pointed out that this offering functioned to purify only sancta and never people since the blood of this offering was always applied to objects in the sanctuary and not individuals (Jacob Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray," 391). Thus the primary function of this offering was the purification of sancta. The result of the sin or uncleanness (defilement of sancta) was expiated so that the individual would not be cut off permanently from the community.

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