

Father, Is Not Thy Promise Pledg'd

Thomas Gibbons (1720–1785)

Father, is not thy promise pledg'd
To thine exalted Son,
That thro' the nations of the earth
Thy word of life shall run?

“Ask, and I give the heathen lands
For thine inheritance,
And to the world's remotest shores
Thine empire shall advance.”

Hast thou not said, the blinded Jews
Shall their Redeemer own;
While Gentiles to his standard crowd,
And bow before his throne?

Are not all kingdoms, tribes, and tongues,
Under th' expanse of heav'n,
To the dominion of thy Son
Without exception giv'n?

From east to west, from north to south,
Then be his name ador'd!
Europe, with all thy millions, shout
Hosannahs to the Lord!

Asia and Africa, resound
From shore to shore his fame;
And thou, America, in songs,
Redeeming love proclaim!

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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Those Millennial Sacrifices

Kevin T. Bauder

One of the most frequently voiced objections to premillennialism is the presence of an active temple upon earth (Ezek 40–48). More specifically, this prophetic temple includes the ongoing offering of animal sacrifices (Ezek 43:18–27). Opponents of premillennialism argue that these ongoing sacrifices are not consistent with the finality of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross (Heb 10:1–18).

The finality of Christ's sacrifice does not eliminate all possibility of ongoing sacrifices. Believer-priests today can present several sacrifices. They are supposed to offer their bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1–2). Spending themselves in service for the Lord's people is analogous to the drink offering of the Old Testament (Phil 2:17). Financial giving becomes a sweet savor offering to the Lord (Phil 4:18). God receives His children's praise as a sacrifice (Heb 13:15).

Even in the Old Testament, not all the sacrifices had the function of satisfying (propitiating) God's justice. The main “satisfaction” sacrifices were the sin offering and the trespass offering. Other sacrifices expressed gratitude, devotion, worship, or the acknowledgement of God's goodness. Some of these included the peace or thank offering, the wave offering, and the heave offering, among others (there is some uncertainty about which offerings were distinct). Besides animal sacrifices, Old Testament worshippers also presented offerings of grain and drink.

Even before the cross, Israelites offered sacrifices that did not address sins. Christians after the cross also offer sacrifices that do not address sins. One might readily anticipate that millennial believers will also offer sacrifices that do not address sins. Could these non-propitiatory offerings be the explanation for millennial sacrifices?

The problem with this suggestion is that Ezekiel specifically mentions the propitiatory sacrifices. He names both the burnt offering and the sin offering (43:18, 19, 21, 22, 25). He also mentions the peace offering (43:27), so non-satisfaction sacrifices will be offered in the millennial temple. But Ezekiel focuses particularly on the sin offering, and this was the main propitiatory sacrifice under the law.



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Probably the majority view among dispensationalists is that the millennial sacrifices will be symbolic memorials of the work of Christ. The Old Testament offerings pictured and pointed forward to a once-for-all Messianic sacrifice. Similarly, the millennial sacrifices will point back to and picture that Messianic sacrifice. On this view, the millennial sacrifices do not really accomplish anything. In other words, they are not efficacious.

This view has the merit of recognizing a parallel between Old Testament sacrifices and millennial sacrifices. It also rightly points out that God has given believers today a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ. He commands us to observe the Lord's Table as a symbolic reminder of the body and blood of Jesus (1 Cor 11:23–26). A future memorial observance during the millennium would not be out of place.

This explanation is fine as far as it goes, but it does not adequately account for the parallel between Old Testament sacrifices and millennial sacrifices. A better understanding of the role of Levitical sacrifices can help to clarify the role of millennial sacrifices. A key question here is what exactly the Levitical sacrifices were supposed to accomplish.

The New Testament clearly teaches that the sacrifices offered under the law could never remove guilt. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin (Heb 10:4). The sins of Old Testament believers were cleansed in just the same way as those of New Testament believers—by the sacrifice of Christ. The body and blood of Christ is the only offering that has ever satisfied God's justice and provided for the removal of human guilt.

How could the sacrifice of Christ remove the sins of people who lived before the cross? Jesus' death on the cross was efficacious even in the Old Testament because He was a lamb "foreordained [foreknown] before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet 1:20). So certain was the sacrifice of Christ that God could reckon upon it ahead of time. In other words, the sins of Old Testament saints were not simply covered, they were forgiven.

This effect of the death of Christ means that the Levitical sacrifices played no role in securing eternal forgiveness of sins. God could and did save apart from animal sacrifices. Why, then, require the sacrifices under the law?

One reason is that the animal sacrifices were a picture of what Christ would eventually do. They symbolically pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would offer on the cross. Lest anyone misunderstand and think that the animal sacrifices were efficacious, God required those sacrifices to be repeated at regular intervals. This repetition emphasized that the animal sacrifices could not remove guilt (Heb 10:1–10).

But the sacrifices were more than symbols or pictures. They were efficacious in a certain limited way. The Sinai code (the Mosaic law) was more than a revelation of God's righteous character (2 Cor 3:1–11). It was also the civil

code by which the theocracy of Israel was governed. For Israel, God was not simply the eternal, holy judge. He was also the direct national monarch, and the 613 commands and prohibitions were the law of His land.

As a civil code, the Mosaic law carried specific, here-and-now penalties for the infraction of its laws. Those laws could be amazingly detailed. For sinful people, the infraction of those laws must have occurred frequently. If God had dealt directly and immediately with every violation, the population of the nation would have dwindled rapidly.

But God built into His law the possibility that substitutes could bear the civil penalty for certain infractions. The animal sacrifices were the substitutes that God designated. These sacrifices did nothing to remove the eternal consequences of sin, but they did absorb the immediate, here-and-now, civil penalties. They permitted sinful and sinning Israelites to continue to live their lives under the theocratic government of their nation.

Israel is not presently functioning as a theocracy. No nation is, and no nation could. God has never entered into covenant with any earthly nation except Israel. No other nation has the right to claim God as its king. No other nation is obligated to live by God's civil code.

That situation will change when Christ reigns on earth. Israel will be restored as a covenant people of God. Christ will become the reigning theocrat. Other nations will also be brought under His rule. His laws will not only be reflections of divine justice. They will also be the law of all lands.

The saved people who go unglorified into the millennium will still be sinners. More sinners will be born during the thousand years. Those sinners will do what sinners do—they will sin. Just as the Levitical sacrifices provided substitutes to bear the civil penalties for sin, so will the millennial sacrifices. They will not duplicate the once-for-all work of Christ on the cross. They will not propitiate God's eternal justice. But they will provide a substitute to absorb the civil penalty of the law so that ordinary, sinning citizens of the kingdom can live out their lives under Christ's theocratic rule.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
