

## At One with God

### Chapter 7: Atonement: Sanctuary and Sacrifice as Symbols

*Lev. 16, Num. 18:1–8, Ps. 28:2, 132:7, 138:2.*

#### Quotes

- You must believe in God, in spite of what the clergy say. *Benjamin Jowett*
- A thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it. *Oscar Wilde*
- The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction. Jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic-cleanser; a misogynistic homophobic racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal ... *Richard Dawkins*
- God in the Old Testament tells us to bash the heads of infidels and demands of us that we be willing to sacrifice our children's lives at His orders, and the God of traditional Christianity and Islam damns us for eternity if we do not worship him in the right manner. Is this a nice way to behave? I know, I know, we are not supposed to judge God according to human standards, but you see the problem here: If we are not yet convinced of His existence, and are looking for signs of His benevolence, then what other standards can we use? *Steven Weinberg*
- Life is only a long and bitter suicide, and faith alone can transform this suicide into a sacrifice. *Franz Liszt*
- Those things which are precious are saved only by sacrifice. *David Kenyon Webster*
- To give without any reward, or any notice, has a special quality of its own. *Anne Morrow Lindbergh*
- Mankind deserves sacrifice—but not of mankind. *Stanislaw Lec*
- Only a life lived for others is worth living. *Albert Einstein*
- A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act. *Mahatma Gandhi*
- Forgiveness is the ultimate sacrifice. *Serj Tankian*

#### Summary

The sanctuary and its services were designed by God as teaching tools to help his people understand the consequences of sin, their need of salvation-healing, and the achievement of atonement. The death of the animal or bird was to teach the reality of the statement “you will surely die,” not as the penalty inflicted by the divine Punisher, but as the inevitable result of distrusting God—each person reaping what they have sown. However the counterfeit systems of sacrifice to pagan gods have affected how human beings understood what God really wanted. Consequently God repeatedly rejects sacrifices because they are offered without any attempt to understand, a mechanistic procedure for “dealing with the sin problem.” He pleads for more than the “system,” pointing to what he really wants—a changed attitude, a transformed mind, a healed person. Those who did develop a deep relationship with God recognized that sacrifices in and of themselves could never bring about the atonement. God seeks love and agreement with him about

what is true and right, genuine obedience based trusting God and his ways, rather than unthinking submission through ritual. Eventually God came himself to demonstrate all this—which is why there is no longer any need for sanctuary or temple...

### **Questions**

What were the sanctuary and its rituals *for*? With all the pagan ceremonies of the nations surrounding Israel, might it not have been expected that a defective concept of God would result? Why do we wish for holy places? What does God's rejection of sacrifices tell us about what he really wants? Is the sacrifice of Jesus open to similar misunderstandings as those of the Old Testament? What do you see as being taught through the sanctuary and sacrificial system? How do such rituals help our understanding of God in a very different age and culture? How does our view of these Old Testament images affect our understanding of the atonement?

### **No More Holy Places...**

I kicked through the dry dust of the Holy Land. Hot and tired, I'd already seen enough holy places for one day. But here we were, trudging around in summer's heat, on the top of Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

No one knows where the old Temple stood, exactly. Some think it parallels the Dome of the Rock. Others think it lines up with the Golden Gate. Maybe it is east or south. I don't know, I've heard so many theories. Perhaps the best was that the rock that's in the mosque is the site of the altar of sacrifice. Then that puts the most holy place due east. I think.

*Anyway!* The point is that no one now can be sure where this ultimate sacred place is. That's why observant Jews do not enter the Temple Mount area. They would not wish to walk on the most holy place, even if they were totally oblivious that they were doing so.

As I walk, I wonder. Maybe here. Maybe there. In the dry dust, one place looks just like the next. Are my impious feet trampling holy ground, unknowingly? If I rushed back to the time of the Temple, I would be flirting with instant death... (Leviticus 16, Numbers 18 etc).

Then it hits me. *It doesn't matter any more!* For what was once the most sacred place on earth is now lost, unknown, and—strange to say—irrelevant.

And that fact inspires me. For the problem with holy places is that they are an attempt to confine the divine. To bring God down to us, and lock Him up somehow. To make the place important, when in reality the place has no importance at all.

Yes, it may help us to visualize, to give the spiritual some physical form. But all too often the place takes over, and the shrine becomes the focus, not the God behind it all.

That there is no ‘most holy place’ is truly better. For it forces us to look away from the confining aspect of place to the expanse of eternity. For what makes any place holy anyway? Is it not the presence of God Himself?

I find myself walking through another desert place. Through Moses’ eyes, I see a bush burning. Instinctively I know I am on holy ground. Why? Not because of the bush, but because anywhere God treads is holy ground. In the quietness of the instant I meet and speak with God. Like Peter I want to build a ‘tabernacle,’ I want to capture this precious moment in space. But time moves on, and the moment is gone.

### **The encounter with God is what matters**

In the monastery of St. Catherine’s in Sinai you can find the actual burning bush that Moses saw. At least, that’s what the custodians will reverently tell you. Of course, it’s not burning now, and it looks like any other dead bush in the area.

This is why that bush in the monastery is also irrelevant. It does not matter whether it is the ‘authentic’ bush or not. Because any bush will do. The specialness of the bush is in the presence of God, not in any unique characteristic of the bush.

This truth is also true for you and me. The specialness of our life and witness is totally dependent on the presence of God in our lives, not in the unique nature we may possess, or the special place we may occupy.

Places and things pass away. All that’s left of the Temple today are some of the retaining walls round the courtyard. The prophecy of Jesus rings loud through the dusty emptiness: “not one stone will be left on another.” For the disciples who admired the splendor of the Temple with its magnificent stones, this was the symbol of permanence, and the presumptuous confidence in the continued presence of God, despite the people’s evil.

And we still have such Temples today. Those symbols of permanence that we cling to, those aspects of life that convince us that we can enclose and confine God. They may seem permanent, but they are as fragile and temporary as the old Temple in Jerusalem. For the things of this world pass away, and force us to look up from our preoccupation with places and possessions to see the spiritual and the eternal. Even churches are special only as we come there to meet with God—they are not holy in themselves.

Truly, there are no holy places today, nor should we want them. Most of all, we need God in the temple that is us, ourselves, built from living stones, looking for an eternal and spiritual ‘place’ far from this dusty and dying old world where God will ever be with us, and be our God.

Yet God did still initiate the sanctuary and the sacrificial system. While it may not apply today, it did then. Look again at the strict directions given in Leviticus 16 for example, instructions regarding the Day of Atonement. Disobedience was punishable by death. The whole system is challenging to us in our modern world. It is a very different time and place. For God to require such practices causes us much concern. The repeated question

we have is why, and what his intent was. For God spends more time critiquing its practice than commanding it, revealing a vital perspective on what he really wanted...

### **What's the point?**

So what's the point of the sacrificial system? God himself raises the question:

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?” Isaiah 1:11 KJV. Especially in the context—of those who believe all that is required is to go through the ceremony. Why sacrifice? To repeat the old bumper sticker: “God has said it. I believe it. That's all there is to it.”

God certainly did initiate the sacrificial system. He told the Israelites what to do—in great detail. Trouble was they got caught up in the system, the mechanics of salvation, and failed to see the point of it all. So eventually God himself has to intervene, and explain that what they are doing is not what he wanted.

*What are you doing? He asks. What are you thinking? What is the point of all this ceremonial stuff? Most of all: what kind of God do you think I am that you should act this way?*

God puts it bluntly:

“I have no desire for the blood of bulls, of sheep and he-goats. Whenever you come to enter my presence—who asked you for this?” Isaiah 1:11-12 NEB.

The ritualistic worshiper may be forgiven for being surprised. After all, isn't he doing exactly what God told him to do? “Who asked for this—well you did, God!” The one doing the sacrificing can point to chapter and verse, declaring “See, it says so right here!”

But now God is saying that's *not* what he wants: “Do you think I want all these sacrifices you keep offering to me? I have had more than enough...” Isaiah 1:11 TEV.

More than enough. Because the religious systematizers of Isaiah's day had reduced the sacrificial system to just a mechanical process. Sinned? No problem—just sacrifice, and it's all taken care of! So easy... Sinned again? Same answer—another sacrifice. More sins, more sacrifices. It's an easy payback system—you get into debit, and so you gain credit through sacrifice. Simple!

Of course, the worshiper might wonder about the God who set up the system—what kind of person was this blood-and-fat demanding deity? But hey—he was the one who asked, so you did what you were told, right?

So God has to fix the misconception: “I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.” Isaiah 1:11 NIV. *What were you thinking? That I was some kind of bloodthirsty ogre who could only be satisfied with blood and the violent death of animals?*

### **God is disgusted**

In fact God has to put the whole system on the line, rejecting the gross perversion of what he had intended: “Who asked you to do all this tramping about in my Temple? It’s useless to bring your offerings. I am disgusted...” Isaiah 1:12 TEV.

*God is disgusted.* As we look at the sacrificial system, we’re likewise disgusted. This system seems to have more to do with some perverse market-place than the plan of salvation. This is why Jesus came in and cleansed the Temple—throwing out the God-abusers, the religionists who were so perversely misrepresenting God and his relationship to us. He and his father are one, urging the people to “Bring no more futile... offerings.” Isaiah 1:13 NJB.

So what *does* God want, speaking through Isaiah to his people? “Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” Isaiah 1:16, 17 NIV. Instead of relying on some ritualistic system, *do right!* Instead of “taking care of sin” in some legal way, God tells his people to learn and accept the ways of *right doing* and *right being*.

Instead of a preoccupation with legal status, what is far more important in God’s eyes is a life that is lived right. He would far rather you spend time in doing right for others than in fulfilling what you believe are significant religious niceties. For you can be wholly wrong even as you try to observe the religious laws. How? Because of the way you are thinking.

What God is looking for is a meaningful relationship. He identifies what he really wants: “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” Isaiah 66:2 NIV. Respect, honor, acceptance—a serious attitude that is thinking towards God, not a blind following of the rules that will “fix” any problems with this demanding deity.

### **Pig’s blood**

To those who preferred form and ceremony over the meaning, the actual symbols over what they pointed to, God in the very next verse has strong words:

“But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig’s blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations.” Isaiah 66:3 NIV.

With the wrong perspective, says God, sacrifice is like murder; offerings are just killing animals—even a pet dog. Horrifyingly, God says that your gifts to him are like a present of pig’s blood—a particularly dreadful thought to the Israelites to whom he was speaking. Even burning incense is likened to idolatry. In other words, *the whole system has been so corrupted and perverted that it teaches the opposite of what God intended—because of*

*the attitude of the worshipers.* They have “chosen their own ways”—doing their own thing—and are evil self-centered religionists who use the sacrificial system to take care of the “God problem.”

### **Worthless worship**

This is absolutely worthless worship, says God. As if he really *needed* such sacrifices: “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens... Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?” (Psalm 50:9, 13 NIV).

No—such ideas come from paganism: the perverted ideas that claim god needs to be appeased and propitiated and satisfied with violent death, and with plenty of blood. Does the true God need blood? Is he some vampire that drinks blood? What kind of God do such ideas portray?

The truth is, says David at the end of the same Psalm, the kind of sacrifices are those that describe our relationship to our loving Lord, representing the right image of who God truly is, “that I may show him the salvation of God.” (Psalm 50:23 NIV). David expresses his personal desire for God, and the sanctuary is the symbol: “Listen to my prayer for mercy as I cry out to you for help, as I lift my hands toward your holy sanctuary.” (Psalm 28:2 NLT).

It was not just Isaiah among the prophets that condemned such futile attempts to manipulate and control God, to try to gain salvation through killing livestock:

“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them,” says God through Amos (5:21, 22 NIV).

Why? Again God is tired of lip service, and the failure of his people to recognize meaning and significance. They seem quite content to use the “required payment system” of animal sacrifice to balance their sin deficit. As the system became such a routine part of life, the people came to see this sacrificial duty as just another part of life, another habit to go through to placate and satisfy this demanding God.

Instead of meaningless and futile offerings, God wants his followers to realize the situation and look to the deeper meaning and significance of relating to him. It’s not the sacrificial process, but what it signifies:

“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Amos 5:24 NIV.

### **Business transactions**

Similarly God through Jeremiah denounced the failure of the people to even listen as they made their ritualistic sacrifices:

“Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law. What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me.” Jeremiah 6:19, 20 NIV.

“We’re giving God so much,” the people would tell themselves. “Even the costliest incense from Arabia—the land of Sheba—nothing is too good for our God. We pay the highest of prices, so God should fix everything for us!”

Such an attitude reflects a total failure to listen to God, to understand the meaning of his laws. Most of all, it represents a complete rejection of a personal relationship, and turns the whole process into just a business transaction.

And while today we do not physically sacrifice, many still are most comfortable operating the system, transacting business with the One who would rather have our love, not our check books.

### **Playing the game**

A compelling example is that of King Saul as he lost his way. Saul knew that religious observance was a powerful tool, and tried to use the power of religion to bolster his fading fortunes. In his arrogance, Saul usurped the right to offer sacrifices—seeking to play the system to his political advantage. But the result was disaster, as Samuel realized, pointing out that it was not the actual sacrifices God desired, but the right attitude of mind:

“But Samuel replied: ‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.’” 1 Samuel 15:22, 23 NIV.

Saul lost out precisely *because* he thought he could utilize the sacrificial system. He was not looking for an appropriate relationship with God; rather he simply wanted to manipulate the process to his own advantage.

Despite God’s provision of the sacrificial system for the Israelites (and notice that for a significant part of the Old Testament period the system was not in place), many Biblical passages relate to the inability of the system to actually “work” and achieve what God most wanted. As just one example, take this recognition from David:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have opened; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.” Psalm 40:6 NIV (alternative reading).

### **What God really wants**

What does God want then? David answers in the same psalm, pointing to the relational aspect, the love of salvation:

“But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, ‘The LORD be exalted!’” (Psalm 40:16 NIV).

And again:

“I bow before your holy Temple as I worship. I praise your name for your unfailing love and faithfulness; for your promises are backed by all the honor of your name.” (Psalm 138:2 NLT).

Even the very last Old Testament book once again concludes with the vanity of meaningless offerings, the futility of sacrificing without thoughtful recognition, and the desire for a true relationship with God. In fact, God is so moved that he wishes the temple to be closed to such pointless actions that achieved nothing:

“Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will accept no offering from your hands.’” (Malachi 1:10 NIV).

Divine displeasure—not because of the wrong rituals, or inappropriate sacrifices, or even the defective system, but because the worshiper is just going through the motions, acting a part, fulfilling obligations. There is no attempt at understanding, no desire for a close connection with this God—their chief concern is “just make the payment!”

What God truly seeks is made clear earlier in the book:

“‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’” (Malachi 1:2 NIV).

God wants true love and agreement, true obedience that is based on recognizing right rather than blind, uncaring ritual.

Rather like the prophet Micah who asked:

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?  
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Micah 6:6-7 NIV.

When you look at all the regulations that God put in place in the Old Testament—the way the sanctuary was to be made, how the sacrifices were to be performed, how the worshipers were to behave, it almost seems that God was a very demanding person. So when we read:

“The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the LORD.

“I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? **Stop bringing meaningless offerings!** Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! **Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!** Isaiah 1:11-17 NIV (my emphasis).

Now this is very strange from the God who has given very detailed instructions on just how to present offerings. You can imagine the people saying, “But, but—this is what you wanted, isn’t it? We’re just following the rules, the requirements you gave us!”

The trouble with us is that we just want to do what’s necessary, especially when it comes to God. Just do what he wants, we tell ourselves. No point in arguing—after all he’s God, right? So why worry if it doesn’t make sense. Just do it anyway! Just follow his demands, and it’ll be fine.

Martin Luther crawled up the steps of St Peter’s, thinking that was what God wanted. Saul, before he became Paul, went round persecuting Christians because he thought that was what God wanted.

The answer to the question “what does God want?” is the basis for all religions. The different answers express our different ideas about what God wants: sacrifice, ritual, penance, self-denial, good works, money, time, talents...

But what does God *really* want? Micah answers: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8 NIV.

Sacrifices don’t work. For as Hebrews makes clear, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:4 NIV).

Here we see clearly the intent of Hebrews—that God is operating in a way that takes the old “methodology” and now explains it all in Jesus. Paul is using all the old symbols and types to show that they now make sense—and make sense only in the person, life and ministry of Jesus. So there is no need to insist on the old “patterns”—for they have no meaning of themselves, only as God is revealed in Jesus.

If this is so, why did God institute the system? Is it not because at least there was so way in which believers might catch a glimpse of what God could do? And is it not the same for us today? Can we not become as preoccupied with the system and all the procedures

and fail to see the God who wants us to come to him for healing salvation? Even Paul refuses to get into “sanctuary-ology.” (See Hebrews 9:5).

The danger in looking too much at the sanctuary is that we spend our time on the symbols and the practices, and don't see God. For as is so often mentioned yet so little practiced, the sanctuary was a picture book, a teaching device, an illustration to help an illiterate band of wanderers to better understand the fundamental truths about God and salvation.

So instead of asking the interpretation of every piece of furniture, let us ask what insights into the nature and character of God are provided by the sanctuary. This is exactly what Paul is doing in Hebrews, so it is hardly off-topic! He says that the Holy Spirit was showing us (9:8), and then concludes: “The ceremonies are concerned with food and drink, various washings and rules for bodily conduct, and were only intended to be valid until the time when Christ should establish the truth.” (Hebrews 9:10 Phillips). In other words, they were teaching tools on the way to truth, but they were not the truth. Jesus is the truth—and what is the truth he came to reveal? The full truth about God, and the solution of the issues in the great controversy, and how he could save us from ourselves. It is only from that perspective that the sanctuary makes sense.

Only God can heal the damage of sin—and systems are no substitute for a deeply personal relationship with our loving Lord, which was God's intention from the beginning.

### **Misunderstanding the Atonement**

Because of the way the sanctuary and its system of sacrifice was misunderstood, so too the way God achieves the atonement can also be the subject of much misunderstanding. Just as ancient Israel looked to the rites and rituals to save them, so too can we look to such “processes” as the mechanisms for our own salvation. But the sanctuary and all that happened there was meant to teach the truth about God, and similarly the life and death of Jesus was meant to do the same. But it is not surprising that there is much misunderstanding, since the truth about God is the most contested issue in the whole of the great controversy.

So instead of being the wonderful way in which we are reconciled to God, the atonement is turned on its head and made into the process by which God is changed and reconciled to us. In this view, Christ is punished so that God can forgive, and the beautiful image of sacrifice is debased into blood payment to appease the anger of a vengeful god. This is real paganism. Note this:

Every pagan religion has its sacrifice, and this sacrifice is derived from the true Sacrifice by which the world is to be redeemed, through a degeneracy from the true type of that sacrifice which God gave to man at the gate of the forfeited Eden. But Satan has brought it around so that the pagan sacrifice means just the opposite of the true. The meaning of the true sacrifice is this: “*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*” Every sacrifice truly offered was a revelation, an

expression of that great sacrifice by which God was to give the pledge to all his intelligent creatures of all worlds *that he so loved them that, if need be, he would give his life to redeem them*. But the pagan sacrifice speaks of a god of wrath and anger, whose wrath must in some way be appeased, perchance by the blood of a lamb, or it may be only by the blood of a fair maid, or innocent child, or some other human victim. When he smells the freshly flowing blood, they believe his vengeance will be satisfied, and he will be propitiated.

What shall we say of the false idea of the atonement, held even by many in the popular Protestant churches of today, and expressed in a late confession of faith in these words, “Christ died to reconcile the Father unto us”? This is not the place to enter into a discussion of that theme; suffice it to say that it is the pagan idea of sacrifice applied to Christianity. God, they think, was angry; he must pour forth his wrath upon some one. If upon man, it would eternally damn him, as he deserved; but this would interfere with God’s plan and purpose in creating the worlds, so this must not be. And yet God must not be cheated of his vengeance; for this reason he pours it forth upon Christ, that man may go free. So when Christ died, he was slain really by the wrath and anger of the Father. This is paganism. The true idea of the atonement makes God and Christ equal in their love, and one in their purpose of saving humanity. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” The life of Christ was not the price paid *to the Father* for our pardon; but that life *was the price which the Father paid* to so manifest his loving power as to bring us to that repentant attitude of mind where he could *pardon us freely*.

Thus Satan has transformed the truth of God’s love into a lie, and even infused this lie into the very doctrine of the atonement. G. E. Fifield, *God is Love* (Chicago, Theodore Reese, 1897). pp.33-34.

### **Signs and illustrations**

I like signs. I read them all the time. I am informed, I am warned, I am secure. I look at road signs, and anticipate the dangers they indicate. I see the picture-language, and appreciate that though the symbols are far from perfect, they are an adequate way of informing me quickly of the situation.

Some don’t seem to like signs. Like the Californian driver who drove off the end of an earthquake-damaged highway because she ignored the danger signs. Or those who are completely unfazed by the deathly warnings on cigarette packs. Or those who refuse to believe maps and drive in the opposite direction. *All very foolish!*

Signs are there for a reason. OK so we may not always follow what the signs say, but they have a very definite purpose. Most of all that we know what is going on.

The sanctuary was intended by God as a sign. As an illustration of the need to come to him, to repent, and be changed. As way of illustrating the atonement, the restoration of harmony between the sin-sick rebel and the healing God of love. The fact that so many

missed the point and turned the whole picture into a ritualistic mechanism to “deal with sin” does not negate God’s intention. Through the sanctuary, and the Temple later, each person was encouraged to come to terms with their sinful state and the need for God’s cure. The fact this was turned into a cattle-market for the conveyor-belt sin-eradication system—the Temple that Jesus had to cleanse—does not mean that God was in error in trying to make people think of their situation. The all-important concept that sin results in death should have made each worshiper consider—but instead they just relied on the blood of bulls and goats—the signs—as the actual reality that forgave their sins and set them right. As if!

Jesus spoke about signs too. Was it to provide secret knowledge, or special inside information—or to give comfort and confirmation? Unfortunately too many have focused on the signs instead of what they are truly for—to confirm, rather than to be aspects of peculiar speculation.

So too the heavenly sanctuary. This is not to be misapplied either. It too is a concept to help us (and the Universe) understand what is going on—what the problem is, and how God fixes it. The solution is not a question of providing sufficient sacrifices or enough blood. It is about bringing the whole Universe back into harmony through the *demonstration* of how God saved and heals those who wish, those who have chosen evil and now wish to come back, agreeing that right is inherently right.

### **Conclusion**

The sanctuary was a lesson-book to God’s people in ancient times, that when coupled with the sacrificial system, was meant to communicate vital concepts. However even the Israelites in their day did not recognize the true significance of what they were being taught. Again and again God rejects their “meaningless sacrifices,” because the worshippers believed that by fulfilling the rituals they were set right. Through his prophets God rejects such mechanistic worship, pleading for understanding and true relationship. In fact he says he has no pleasure in the blood of bulls and goats (Is. 1:11). Similarly in Is. 66 he compares sacrifices to murder or presenting dogs or offering pig’s blood! Why? Because “They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations.” (Is. 66:3 NIV). God is wanting far more than sacrifice—he wants relationship, understanding, recognition of meaning, true worship, considered thought...

Sanctuary and sacrifice are *symbols*. They are not the reality. God as revealed in Jesus is the reality, and he is our salvation. Only as we understand the truth behind the pictures can we truly trust in our trustworthy God, allowing him to heal the sin-damage, and re-create his image in us. Nothing else is enough...

© Jonathan Gallagher

### Atonement study 7: EGW quotes

God chose Israel to reveal His character to men. He desired them to be as wells of salvation in the world. To them were committed the oracles of heaven, the revelation of God's will. In the early days of Israel the nations of the world, through corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. They had once known Him; but because "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, . . . their foolish heart was darkened." Romans 1:21. Yet in His mercy God did not blot them out of existence. He purposed to give them an opportunity of again becoming acquainted with Him through His chosen people. Through the teachings of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before all nations, and all who would look to Him should live. Christ was the foundation of the Jewish economy. The whole system of types and symbols was a compacted prophecy of the gospel, a presentation in which were bound up the promises of redemption. But the people of Israel lost sight of their high privileges as God's representatives. They forgot God and failed to fulfill their holy mission. The blessings they received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages they appropriated for their own glorification. . . . Priests and rulers became fixed in a rut of ceremonialism. They were satisfied with a legal religion, and it was impossible for them to give to others the living truths of heaven. {AA 14-15}

The people whom God had called to be the pillar and ground of the truth had become representatives of Satan. They were doing the work that he desired them to do, taking a course to misrepresent the character of God, and cause the world to look upon Him as a tyrant. The very priests who ministered in the temple had lost sight of the significance of the service they performed. They had ceased to look beyond the symbol to the thing signified. In presenting the sacrificial offerings they were as actors in a play. The ordinances which God Himself had appointed were made the means of blinding the mind and hardening the heart. God could do no more for man through these channels. The whole system must be swept away. {DA 36}

Christ Himself was the originator of the Jewish system of worship, in which, by types and symbols, were shadowed forth spiritual and heavenly things. Many forgot the true significance of these offerings; and the great truth that through Christ alone there is forgiveness of sin, was lost to them. The multiplying of sacrificial offerings, the blood of bulls and goats, could not take away sin. . . . {AG 155}

The sacrificial system, committed to Adam, was also perverted by his descendants. Superstition, idolatry, cruelty, and licentiousness corrupted the simple and significant service that God had appointed. Through long intercourse with idolaters the people of Israel had mingled many heathen customs with their worship. . . . {PP 364}

[Isaiah 1:16, 17 quoted.] The God whom they had been claiming to serve, but whose character they had misunderstood, was set before them as the great Healer of spiritual disease. {PK 314-5}

Jesus looked upon the innocent victims of sacrifice, and saw how the Jews had made these great convocations scenes of bloodshed and cruelty. In place of humble repentance of sin, they had multiplied the sacrifice of beasts, as if God could be honored by a heartless service. The priests and rulers had hardened their hearts through selfishness and avarice. The very symbols pointing to the Lamb of God they had made a means of getting gain. Thus in the eyes of the people the sacredness of the sacrificial service had been in a great measure destroyed. {DA 590}