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Legal substitution *and* experiential transformation *in the typology of Leviticus: Part 2*

The setting of the book of Leviticus lies within the Israelites' epic journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land that the Lord had promised them (Lev. 1:1; 7:38; 26:46; 27:34). God provided this journey in order to transform their experience, especially in relation to Himself as their covenant Lord. At Mount Sinai, God told the children of Israel through Moses: " 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' " (Exod. 19:4-6).¹

To accept this calling as a holy nation, the Israelites were to cooperate with God by living holy lives in harmony with His holy character, which was reflected in His clear instructions (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26). He established an earthly residence in their midst (Exod. 25:8) in order to be as close to His erring people as possible without destroying them by revealing His unveiled glory (cf. Exod. 33:20). There, through the ministry of priests whom

He authorized, they were to interact with Him by means of rituals. These rituals maintained His awesome presence with regular services (Exod. 30:7, 8; Lev. 24:5-9; Num. 28:1-8), honored Him on special occasions (Lev. 23; Num. 28:9-29:39), expressed thanks and devotion (Lev. 7:12, 16), and sought reconciliation with Him when they violated His laws (Lev. 4:1-6; 7). God's loving presence, guiding and protecting them, was at the center of their camp and lives (Num. 2). The experience of the Israelites was radically changed from the bad old days when Pharaoh's oppressive power exploited and crushed their lives.

The following sections first explore the evidence in Leviticus and related passages regarding God's plan for the transformation of the Israelites through the typological sanctuary system and then briefly consider the call in the book of Hebrews to enjoy the effects of Christ's sacrifice.

Participation of offerers in sacrifices for sins

When the Israelites committed sin, they were to express their repentance and ongoing loyalty to God through accepting His provisions for putting things right by offering sacrifices. It was

not enough to believe in the effectiveness of the morning and evening burnt offerings and the special sacrifices on festival occasions that the priests performed for the whole community (Num. 28; 29). An individual was to bring his or her own animal, lay one hand on its head, slit its throat, and cut up the animal as indicated (Lev. 1:3-13; 4:22-35).² While it is true that priests were to perform all activities of mediation connected with the holy altar, including applying blood to it and burning the Lord's portions (Lev. 1:5, 7-9; 4:25, 26; etc.), the offerers also participated in the necessary sacrifices because of their sins.

Priests and offerers worked together, with the offerers entering into the experience, and the priests providing the activities that the offerers could not do for themselves. The actions performed by the priest and the offerer were both necessary and inseparable. Not until the sacrificial process was complete could it be said that expiation (Heb. verb *kipper*) was accomplished (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). This process included the application of the blood and flesh to the altar by the priest. Therefore, the sacrifice included not only the death of the victim but also priestly mediation.

Participation by offerers did not mean that they earned their own salvation, which was beyond their capability and was God's gift to them through the sanctuary system that He had set up. Rather, the offerer's part was to accept and cooperate with the gift, expressing faith in the divinely appointed ransom that pointed beyond a token animal to a much greater Sacrifice.

The stream of events in Leviticus 5 reveals the experience of an Israelite who sins and consequently bears blame

23, 27, 28; 5:4, 5; 6:4).⁴ Offering any kind of sacrifice for sin would express repentance. An additional oral confession contributed to the expression of repentance in some cases in which sin had been concealed (Lev. 5:1; Num. 5:7) or had resulted from forgetfulness (Lev. 5:2–4). Another expression of penitence was the payment of reparation (principal amount plus 20 percent penalty) in cases involving the misuse of property. An Israelite, who inadvertently misused something holy, was

to His immortal holiness. He did this through a system that protected holy things and areas from contamination by physical ritual impurities. Israelites who had minor impurities were to gain purification from them by bathing, washing their clothes, and waiting until evening (Lev. 15:5–11). When the causes of serious impurities had stopped—in some cases, when they were healed from unhealthy conditions—those affected were to offer purification offerings supplemented by burnt offerings

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that would lead to punishment (Lev. 5:1). When the person confesses the sin (v. 5)³ and offers a purification offering (a so-called sin offering), the priest expiates (*kipper*) for the individual from (preposition *min*) the sin (v. 6). This means that the sin is removed from the sinner. Therefore, the person is to be treated as though the sin had not occurred, which means that the blame is gone, as confirmed by the fact that God forgives (v. 10). Not stated is the individual's expected response, which should be relief, gratitude, and commitment to avoid repeating the sin in the future.

The Israelites were accountable for offering sacrifices for sin when they realized on their own that they had sinned or when someone else made it known to them (Lev. 4:13, 14, 22,

required to make reparation to God (v. 16), and a person who used a false oath to defraud someone else was to make reparation to the wronged party before offering a reparation offering (Lev. 6:5; cf. Matt. 5:23, 24).⁵ So the system of expiatory sacrifices and associated penalties required the active involvement of sinners to acknowledge their faults and put things right in order to heal the relationships that they had hurt.⁶ Through this system, God was teaching them how to live in harmony with His values.⁷

Participation on other occasions

In addition to teaching the Israelites how to deal with their acts of sin, God also taught them about their physical state of mortal sinfulness by contrast

(Lev. 12:6–8; 14:19; 15:14, 15, 29, 30).⁸ The fact that purification offerings remedied both sins (Lev. 4:1–5:13) and physical impurities indicates that they pointed to comprehensive healing from moral faultiness and physical mortality (cf. Ps. 103:3).⁹

On the Day of Atonement, the remaining effects of physical impurities and moral faults that had accumulated at the sanctuary were purged from it, resulting in the moral purification of the people (Lev. 16, esp. vv. 16, 30). This purification was provided for all Israel; but to receive the benefit, each individual was required to participate in the experience by practicing physical self-denial (Lev. 16:29, 30; 23:26–32). Self-denial could include fasting and other practices associated with an intense petition to God at times of

special need (see Ps. 35:13; Ezra 8:21; Dan. 10:2, 3, 12).

God arranged for plenty of opportunities for the Israelites to improve their internal attitudes through the influence of impressive activities, including the annual festivals (Lev. 23), if they would only allow themselves to be transformed. Everyone was amazed and profoundly impressed when divine fire consumed the inaugural sacrifices (Lev. 9:24). But then two newly consecrated priests failed to honor God (Lev. 10:1–3), and the book of Numbers tells how an entire generation lost the opportunity to enter the Promised Land due to their unfaithfulness (Num. 14; 26:64, 65). The Lord provided clear and powerfully persuasive invitations, but He did not force His people to be transformed. He respected their free choice, even if they chose against Him.

Experiential transformation in Hebrews

The book of Hebrews reveals transforming effects on those who accept Christ's sacrifice. The blood of Christ will "purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). Similarly, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). The promise of a new covenant, in which God would put His law in the minds and hearts of His people and remember their sins no more (Jer. 31:31–34) applies to all who accept Christ's single offering (Heb. 10:15–18).

Hebrews 10:19–25 urges fellow believers to accept God's invitation:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil

conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.


Here, experiential transformation is based on the accomplished fact of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. Without that sacrifice, there could be no transformation. It is also true that unless a person accepts the sacrifice and experiences transformation, the sacrifice does not achieve its goal for that individual. This is why the affirmation in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" is followed in the next verse by the appeal, "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (v. 20).

Conclusion

In Leviticus, the animal sacrifices serve as token substitutes to ransom the lives of Israelites from blame leading to punishment. Aaronic priests also bore such blame as substitutes for their people, but they did not actually suffer the consequences. The book of Hebrews, however, identifies Christ as the Priest who bore human sins and actually suffered the consequences of those sins as the Victim of adequate value. This combination of roles as Victim-Priest proves that Christ's atonement is substitutionary.

The scope of Christ's atonement is not limited to the Israelites but is available to all the inhabitants of the earth (John 3:16). Anyone can be saved—as long as they accept Christ's provision for their salvation (Acts 13:39).

The Israelites were faulty, but their covenant Lord called them to follow Him by living holy lives in harmony with His principles. He gave them sacrificial remedies for their moral failures and

for the physical impurities that signified their mortality. Having provided what they needed, God required their obedience, including participation in sacrifices, to express their choice to receive His gift of deliverance and transformation. In harmony with Leviticus, the book of Hebrews invites people to enter a transformed experience by accepting the reality of Christ's ministry on their behalf. 

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the ESV.
- 2 On women doing this, see Mayer I. Gruber, "Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, eds. Jacob Neusner, Baruch Levine, and Ernest Frerichs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 35–48.
- 3 Oral confession is only required in certain cases (see also Num. 5:7). Bringing any sacrifice for sin is an unspoken confession.
- 4 Lev. 5:17 is an unusual but significant case: "If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity" (ESV); that is, he shall bear his blame or culpability. Here a person somehow realizes that he is guilty, perhaps through pangs of conscience or by suffering adverse circumstances that indicate divine displeasure, although apparently the individual has not identified the sin. In such a situation, the sinner can be freed from culpability by offering a reparation offering (v. 18). The fact that the person knows to bring the sacrifice shows that he realizes his guilt, but there is no requirement to make prior reparation because he cannot identify the precise sin.
- 5 On a false oath as a sin of sacrilege in this context, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 337, 338, 365, 366.
- 6 Although the Lord's revelation of Himself and His ways to the Israelites inspired holy fear (Exod. 19:16; 20:18, 19), it removed the dread of the unknown that haunted other peoples. They were often uncertain as to the wishes and reactions of their gods and other supernatural beings. When things went wrong, they had to figure out which god or demon was upset, why he or she was causing them harm, and how to placate the supernatural being. The Israelites had no such uncertainty: There was only one God, He told them how to keep Him happy, and He told them how to remedy their errors, even when they could not identify their mistakes. God's law sounds like good news! See Roy Gane, "Leviticus," in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 1:294.
- 7 "Values are what Leviticus is all about. They pervade every chapter and almost every verse." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 1.
- 8 Regarding supplementation of purification offerings by burnt offerings, see Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 84. In Lev. 14, one being purified from a scaly skin disease (so-called leprosy) is also required to bring other items, including a reparation offering, oil, and a grain offering (vv. 12–14, 15–18, 20).
- 9 *Ibid.*, 160–162, 198–202.

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