

## THE ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF SACRIFICE IN SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>

CORNELIS VAN DAM

Since the legislation concerning sacrifice is chiefly found in Leviticus, we will approach our subject especially within that context. First, let us look at some features, characteristics, and themes of Leviticus which especially impact on the topic of sacrifice. Next, we will consider some aspects of Old Testament Law which have some effect on the sacrificial laws. And finally, we will deal with sacrifice as such.

### *Leviticus*

#### *The place of the people*

The book of Leviticus consists largely of a compilation of laws which involve the priests. It is, therefore, not surprising that Leviticus has often been characterized as a priestly handbook or manual. Although there is truth in this characterization, it should not be overlooked that most of the laws in Leviticus apply to all Israel. Actually, only a relatively small part of Leviticus concerns the priests alone (e.g., Lev. 21-22 contain the rules for priestly holiness). With respect to sacrifice, it should be noted that the laws for sacrifice are introduced by, "Speak to the people of Israel." Not only the priests, but the people had to know. Thus we read, for instance, in Leviticus 1:2, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD you shall bring your offering of animals of the herd or the flock. . . .'" A little later in Leviticus 4:2, we read, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying if a person sins unintentionally. . . ." So it's Israel that is addressed. Or, another example, we read

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<sup>1</sup>This is a somewhat abbreviated text of a lecture delivered at Mid-America Reformed Seminary on November 8, 1989. Due to factors largely outside my control, the publishing of this lecture has been a long time coming. To prevent further delay, footnotes have been kept to an absolute bare minimum.

elsewhere in Leviticus 1-5, "If anyone. . . ." These laws were for everyone to note. That is very significant, for God did not want his people to be ignorant. The people had to know and they were entitled to be fully informed as to exactly what was expected of them as well as of the priests in the service of the LORD and his sanctuary. Did this service not deeply concern every true Israelite? Were they not a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6)?

To underline this feature of the full involvement of the people in knowing the priestly regulations, one should be aware of the fact that this was radically different from the secrecy of priestly legislation found in the surrounding nations. There the priesthood had their secret writings to which only the initiated had access. Furthermore, they used their secret knowledge to look inside the sacrificial animal to see what the gods had to say. The divinatory arts of examining the liver in order to "read" the message of the gods was a jealously guarded secret and the priests did not want to share their knowledge with others. Such secrecy was not the case in Israel and certainly not with respect to sacrifice. Thus the description of Israel as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" is a very meaningful description. It sets Israel off from all the other nations round about, also with respect to sacrifice.

The expression "kingdom of priests" also reminds us of how things used to be done with respect to sacrifice, namely, that the head of each household used to sacrifice to God. Think of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; they took care of sacrificial ritual (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:18; etc.). Subsequently, the first boy was set apart as priest in the family. One can think of Exodus 13:2 where the LORD says, "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." Now, if you keep this special place of the firstborn in mind, then we can perhaps begin to understand the references to priests before the institution of the Levitical priesthood. In Exodus 19:22 we read, "Let the priests that come near to the LORD, consecrate themselves." (Cf. Ex. 24:5, "And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.") Perhaps we should see these references to priests in the context of the firstborn acting as priest for the family. As you know, the tribe of Levi eventually took the position of the firstborn (Num. 3:5-13; 8:5-26; cf. Ex. 32:29). The priests were appointed by the LORD from the descendants of Aaron of the tribe of Levi. However, even with the official priesthood, the "personal sacrifice" persisted. Think of the place of the father in the Passover sacrifice (Ex. 12; cf. Deut. 16) and Manoah sacrificing (Judg.

13:16; cf. Ex. 20:22-24; Josh. 8:31; Judg. 20:26; 21:4; 1 Sam. 13:9). It is also significant that the one bringing the sacrifice to the tabernacle and later to the temple had a crucial role. He had to actually slaughter the animal (e.g., Lev. 1:5).

Considering this whole context, it may be significant that the first duty of Levi according to the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33) was not sacrifice, but the means of revelation called the Urim and Thummim. Moses said: "And of Levi he said, 'Give to Levi thy Thummim and thy Urim to thy godly one whom thou didst test at Massah. . . .'" After Moses described the positive contribution of Levi, he said "they shall teach Jacob thy ordinances and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thy altar." Sacrifice is mentioned last. That is very significant. If one remembers that sacrifice was closely related to divination in the Ancient Near East, the LORD makes absolutely sure, so to speak, that the means of revelation are kept totally separated from sacrifice. The Urim and Thummim are mentioned first and sacrifice at the very end.

### *The theme of holiness*

The characterization of Israel as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" ties in with the major theme of Leviticus where the chief sacrificial regulations are found. This is the theme of "holiness." (Cf. Lev. 20:26, "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.")

Leviticus can be divided into two parts.<sup>2</sup> The first part (Lev. 1-16) has as theme how the sinner is to be holy and thus have fellowship with the LORD. The second part (Lev. 17-27) describes how the believer maintains his holiness and fellowship with the LORD. Now, if you look at Leviticus that way, then you see that even though only the first seven chapters deal specifically with sacrifice, nevertheless sacrifice is an underlying theme through the entire book of Leviticus. Offerings are found in the first seven chapters, priestly mediation by means of sacrifice in chapters 8-10, and then regulations of clean and unclean again involving sacrifices (chap. 11-15). Of course, at the center of Leviticus in chapter 16 is the day of atonement with its sacrifices.

How the believer maintains this holiness is further elaborated in chapters 17-22 where holiness in eating, drinking and the sexual

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. for what follows: W. Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible* (4th rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 216.

relationship are elaborated and again sacrifices have their place. In chapters 23-27, religious festivals and finally the promises and threats of the covenant are mentioned. So the theme of holiness is very closely related to that of sacrifice. Again it is significant that Israel is known as a "kingdom of priests."

The demand for holiness helps us to understand why Israel was expected to know as much as possible about the priestly tasks and about God's requirements for sacrifice. The task of the Levites was, therefore, to teach Israel the law of God. The LORD did not want to leave the so called "laity" in ignorance with the "clergy" ruling over them with no one to check them. That is the way it was in the other nations and it became that way in Israel when that nation did not obey the LORD, but God did not want this situation for his people. For those studying for and for those involved in the ministry of the Word this is an extremely important principle to remember: God's people must be as well informed as possible. This knowledge is crucial for keeping God's people as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16). As ministers, we must therefore not shrink back from preaching the whole counsel of God, including a book like Leviticus which is often (incorrectly) perceived to be dry and dusty.

Leviticus has something to tell us. Within the context of Leviticus' theme of holiness, we notice two things. In the first place, Israel was to be holy because God dwelt in her midst. Especially in the wilderness wanderings this was very much accentuated by the fact that the tabernacle was right in the middle of the camp. God was close and, therefore, the ministry of reconciliation was needed. This ministry was like an insulating wall around the presence of the LORD, lest Israel be struck down by the Holy One; for God's holiness is awesome. Think of the sin of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-7; cf. 24:10-23)! God's wrath against sin has been satisfied in Christ in whom all the sacrifices have been fulfilled. In Christ we too have been made holy, so that as congregation and as believers individually, we are even God's dwelling place and temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16). The demand for holiness is therefore with us today in its full earnestness.

In the second place, Israel had to be holy over against the iniquity of Canaan and so be protected from this unholiness. It is good to remember that the instruction of Leviticus was given at Mt. Sinai and it was God's intention to bring Israel very soon to the promised land. They needed that instruction in the promised land in order to retain their holiness.

It is clear to us living in the twentieth century that we cannot simply take over the laws of Leviticus. However, the principles of Leviticus hold and that is what makes this such an important and a very exciting book. I remind you of our common confession in the Belgic Confession, Article 25, which reads,

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ and that all shadows have been fulfilled so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians, *yet their truth and substance remain* for us in Jesus Christ in whom they have been fulfilled.

In the meantime, we still use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honor according to God's will and to his glory.

Of course, Romans 15:4 comes to mind: "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through the steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

The book of Leviticus in describing to Israel how their holiness was to be attained and maintained is foundational for understanding the Old Testament. The old covenant cannot be understood without an appreciation for the sacrifices and covenant demands that undergirded all of Israel's life. Only if the Old Testament and the principles which are detailed in Leviticus are understood can there be a full appreciation of the New Testament and God's work in Christ and his fulfilling the law. Only then can we also properly understand God's demands for our holiness which include our life before God in society, economic matters, and our worship of him.

#### *Some General Characteristics of Old Testament Law*

The first characteristic is the explicitness of Old Testament law. Very little is left unsaid. Sometimes the thought comes up: Could the LORD not have left something up to his people? Everything is stipulated. There is a reason for it. God is disciplining Israel so that she learns to do exactly as she was told. Perfection is what God demanded and nothing less would do. Israel's way of approaching God, the way Israel brings sacrifices, the kind of sacrifices, everything is precisely delineated. In this way Israel was protected from God's wrath and reminded that God is not man. He is holy. There is no room for man-

made religion. God says in his Word: this way and no other. These laws are covenant laws and as a covenant people Israel had very specific obligations to God. But Israel could not keep God's will perfectly. For that reason, the Day of Atonement was needed. We today have been set free from all kinds of regulations, rule on rule, law on law. But, our covenant responsibilities weigh all the heavier. We are to be holy to him who as our only high priest offered himself for our sins.

The second general characterization is that the law is a unit. Often the law is broken up into moral law (e.g., the Ten Commandments), the civil law (the Old Testament legislation for society), and thirdly, the ceremonial law (the sacrificial and ritual laws). However, there is no specific indication anywhere in the Old Testament that this division is found there. The law is a unit and therefore you find so called moral laws and civil laws side by side (e.g., Lev. 19:18-19; 20:7-9). This does not mean that distinctions such as these cannot be helpful, but we should be very careful not to divide the law up where Scripture presents a unity. Thus, to say that the moral law is still applicable, but the civil and the ceremonial are not, is not really correct. In all law there is both a temporal element (even in the Ten Commandments: see the fourth commandment regarding the seventh day!) and the enduring demand of God (cf. Art. 25 of the Belgic Confession: "their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ"). And therefore, we must accept the entire Old Testament as God's revelation for us, including sacrificial laws. Only, we must distinguish between the temporal element and the enduring demand. The Old Testament must be read in the light of the New Testament and the new situation since Christ's coming. To mention a simple example: in the Old Testament, the LORD told his people at harvest time to leave something in the corners of the fields for the poor. Let them pick it up. The same principle applied to the vineyard (Lev. 19:9-10). But that does not mean that today we have to skip the corners of the fields or that it's wrong to have efficient combines; it simply means that we too must have a social concern for the poor and seek to provide for their needs. That principle remains even though the outward circumstances are totally different.

One final general characterization is that Israel's law is revealed to us so that we can better see and understand the Savior and his work of deliverance. For Christ is the fulfillment and the end of the law (Rom 10:4). What Israel and we cannot do, he did, obeying the law perfectly. He was "foreshadowed by the sacrifices and the other ceremonies of the law" (Heid. Cat., L.D. 16). To put it differently:

God's law and the so-called handbook on the law (namely, Lev.) teach us how sin was counteracted by the LORD, by way of his ordinances. In this struggle against sin, Leviticus preaches Christ. He is *the* means of reconciliation and *the* solution for sin. At bottom, that is the enduring significance of Leviticus. It is the book of holiness and sanctification, and of giving oneself to the LORD in sacrifice which points to Jesus Christ.

### *Sacrifice*

It is very difficult for us to imagine how sacrifices dominated and colored the life of God's people. Especially if one lived in Jerusalem one must have been confronted with the reality of sacrifices in a very vivid way. Think only of the smoke and the smell that would linger around town whenever sacrifices were brought. Every morning and every evening a lamb had to be burnt outside the Temple (Ex. 29:38-39). Think of the scent of blood as it was daily cast on the altar. The fact that the altar of the burnt offering had to be kept burning night and day (Lev. 6:8-13) must have made the fresh scent of burning flesh and wood simply part of the environment. Besides the daily sacrifices of a lamb, there were the sin and guilt offerings, as well as other sacrifices that involved burning: sacrifices for fulfilling your vow (1 Sam. 1:3, 21), for cleansing of a leper (Lev. 14), for purification after childbirth (Lev. 12), consecration of a priest (Lev. 8-9), for releasing from a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:13-21). There were many occasions for sacrifice.

What was the reason for all these sacrifices? What was the bottom line? The bottom line is this: these sacrifices were necessary because God wanted to live with his people. In one way or another, all these sacrifices contributed to God's being with Israel in the tabernacle and later in the temple. There are some common features of the many sacrifices that Israel had to make that demand our attention.

### *The life is in the blood*

The first feature is the shedding of blood. What exactly is the role of blood, as such? A very important passage for our understanding is Leviticus 17:10-13.

If any man of the house of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have

given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood. Any man also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust (RSV).

The important verse for now is verse 11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life." This message is repeated in the Old Testament, for example, in Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 12:23-25, Ezekiel 33:25. In Hebrews 9:22 we read, "according to the law one may say almost everything is cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Here is the gospel! Instead of demanding man's own life and blood, God, knowing that man would not be able to bear his eternal wrath, provided a substitute life and blood, a substitute in animal blood. Man has sinned, but animal blood is sacrificed.

What is the significance of man's sin in this context? By sinning, man had taken from God the perfect life that God had once given to man to be lived to the glory of the Creator. But, having destroyed that perfect life, man could not give that life in holy obedience. He could not return that life to God in thankfulness. Neither could he pay for his sin by enduring the divine anger. Yet, God's justice had to be satisfied. His rule is eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life (Ex. 21:23 25; cf. Gen. 9:6). God, therefore, provided a substitute in the ordained sacrifices, a temporary substitute, for an animal can hardly be expected to pay for man's sin. It is all in anticipation of the coming Christ (cf. Rom. 3:25), for God demands the life blood of man according to his divine justice.

In view of the function of the blood of atonement to atone for Israel and to make this people acceptable to God, and in view of the fact that the blood points to the life of Christ that God demands, one can understand why God so jealously hedged in the matter of blood with commands and prohibitions. This was so from the very beginning. One can think here of Genesis 9:4, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood." The care with which God guarded the blood is evident from other passages as well. If one killed an animal during the desert journey on the way to Canaan, that animal had to be presented



as an offering to the LORD because blood had been shed (Lev. 17:1-9). The blood, the life, belonged to God. Similarly, any animal killed in hunt first had to have its blood poured out on the ground (Lev. 17:13). Thus the blood was safeguarded from desecration. Of course, no one in Israel was to eat blood (Lev. 17:12). One did so only on pain of death (Lev. 17:14). Israel always had to be conscious of the preciousness of blood to God. The blood is the life that God had claimed in his grace as substitutionary atonement for Israel. Blood is life. Death results when you lose your blood. Modern medicine has also seen how the life of a body is literally carried in its blood. God demanded that blood of the animals very jealously for himself and according to his mercy and justice he demanded it as a substitute until the perfect sacrifice should come. We cannot begin to imagine how many sacrifices were brought during Israel's history before the coming of Christ, but it staggers the imagination; it was all for God and it still was not enough to cover justly one sin.

It should be noted, that also the prohibition not to drink blood set Israel separate from the nations round about. There was an idolatrous practice of eating or drinking the blood of animals in order to get in contact with the invisible realm of the gods and spirits. In this way one became much more powerful, especially in battle. God's people were not to engage in such activity and also for this reason they were prohibited from drinking blood (e.g., Lev. 7:26; cf. Zech. 9:7).<sup>3</sup>

Leaving the Old Testament behind, we now move on to the New Testament. When our Savior was crucified on Golgatha, *the* sacrifice was brought and *the* lifeblood was shed (Rom. 5:6-11). As the Lord Jesus said at the last supper: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). With Christ's crucifixion, sin was now officially atoned for (cf. Rom. 3:25). The letter to the Hebrews is full of this central fact. See, for example, the well-known passages of Hebrews 9:11-14, and Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-14.

And now, in view of Christ's perfect sacrifice, the Old Testament prohibition not to eat or drink blood must be seen in the light of the words of our Lord in John 6. Jesus said, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you

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<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., B. Kedar-Kopfstein, in *TDOT* III, 246-247; Noordtjiz, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); W. R. Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (New York: Meridan Books, 1956), 313, 338, 619.

have no life in yourselves" (v. 53). Can you imagine what the Pharisees must have thought? They must have recoiled in horror. Then Jesus went on and said,

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me and I in him (John 6:54-56).

Even the disciples had difficulty accepting these words (John 6:60, 66) and to the unbelieving Jews they were sacrilegious. They would plot to kill him. As believers, we today may consider these words of our Saviour also in the context of the Old Testament, and realize the singular privilege we have in being able to share in that one sacrifice of Christ by indeed eating his flesh and drinking his blood by the mouth of faith. It is clear from John 6 that this eating and drinking is not a literal eating and drinking, but is an eating and drinking with the mouth of faith. (The eating and drinking is within the context of believing, John 6:35, 40.) It is also apparent for those who knew the Old Testament that blood is life (Lev. 17:11). Thus, the meaning of Christ's word is clear. True life can only be found in Christ and therefore one must appropriate him. Then man can give that new life to God. For, God still demands the life he gives, and he gives it now in Christ. Through the Spirit of Christ we are able to give to him, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, that perfect life given in Christ. And so in Christ, we can fulfill the Law.

#### *Implications for today*

We today stand differently over against the prohibition of eating blood than Israel did. We know Christ. But how differently do we view the prohibition to ingest blood? Do we today have to keep the injunction of Leviticus 17:10, 12 and Genesis 9:4? The majority of people answer negatively, since this is part of the shadow pointing to Christ. These prohibitions were to remind God's people of God's holy jealousy for the life and blood. God had a divine right to it in his holy justice. But after the coming of Christ, it doesn't matter.

But what about Acts 15? In Acts 15 the Apostles decided, among other things, that the people had to "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves free from such things you will do well" (Acts 15:29). What does this ruling mean? It meant that the Gentile

believers had to make a complete break with paganism. That's the first prohibition: "Abstain from things sacrificed to idols." But what about the second and third prohibition (abstain from blood and from things strangled)? There are two basic views.

Some say that these bans were added to placate the Jews. After all, the ban on consuming blood was so deeply ingrained in the Jews that it simply would not have worked if Gentile Christians had been allowed to eat blood while Jewish Christians abhorred that kind of thing.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the principles of Romans 14 are often invoked. There we read that "One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him" (Rom. 14:2-3). Thus the second and third prohibitions of Acts 15 were a kind of compromise. Another example of such compromise is given in Acts 21 where Paul submitted to a ritual of purification to avoid giving offense.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, there is something to be said for the need to continue to abide by the prohibition of consuming blood found in Leviticus 17 and Genesis 9. It can be argued that although the symbolic meaning of Leviticus 17 has been fulfilled in Christ, yet there is more here. There is also a general respect for that which belongs to God, namely, blood—the lifeblood. The life is the LORD's, also of animals; and, therefore, this command not to eat blood had been given to Noah within the context of protecting man's life and man's blood (Gen. 9:4, 6). For that reason, this prohibition applies to all men generally. Thus, the church has maintained the ban of Acts 15 for Gentile Christians. There appears to be no record anywhere in the history of the church of this prohibition ever having been put aside. There is, however, specific evidence from Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, V.1,26) that the prohibition was observed in A.D. 177 in the Rhone valley, and from Tertullian (*Apology*, 9, 13) that this rule was in force in North Africa at the end of the second century. Near the end of the ninth century King Alfred of England even included the prohibition of Acts 15 in the preamble to his law code.<sup>6</sup> In light of

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<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., S.G. de Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance* IV (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1981), 199.

<sup>5</sup>For this line of reasoning see, e.g., J. Calvin, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 293-294; G.J. Wenham, *Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 247.

<sup>6</sup>For these and other references, see E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 471-472; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids:

these arguments, some believe that we too must maintain this prohibition.

Of the two views, the one arguing for retention of the prohibition seems to be the most convincing. The prohibition is already found in Genesis 9:4 ("you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood"). Now if we relativize Genesis 9:4, what about the other injunctions such as found in Genesis 9:5-6 in which God demands a reckoning for blood shed? Must we also say that the words "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (v. 6) no longer apply? But were these words not spoken as a general rule for all mankind by being addressed to Noah at the beginning of the post-flood world? Similarly, do the words "be fruitful and multiply" not retain their validity (vv.1,7; cf. Gen. 1:28)? It is thus difficult to justify the extraction of one verse respecting blood (v. 4) and say that it is no longer of binding power, while the remaining injunctions are said to remain in force.

In practical terms, the real consequences of maintaining the prohibition of eating blood are limited. The above serves only as an illustration of approaching Levitical law today. In our society practically all meat is drained of blood and preservatives are injected. It is, however, unfortunately becoming more common to read reports in the papers of the drinking of blood in Satanic rituals.<sup>7</sup> Satanism is on the rise and the prohibition of ingesting blood can be used against it.

### *The use of blood*

How is the blood handled in the bringing of sacrifices? Very briefly, in the case of the burnt offering (Lev. 1:5, 11), the peace offering (Lev. 3:2, 8, 13), and the guilt offering (Lev. 7:2), the blood was splashed or poured on (זרק על) the altar.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of the sin offering, other procedures were followed and the blood was handled differently. When a priest had sinned, the blood was sprinkled in front of the veil of the sanctuary before the Holy of Holies (Lev. 4:6), smeared on the horns of the altar of incense (Lev. 4:7), and the remainder of the blood was poured at the base of the altar of burnt offering (Lev. 4:7; see also Exod. 29:12). The close

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Eerdmans, 1954), 315-316.

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., J. Heerema, "Satanism: Kneeling at the Wrong Feet," *The Banner*, Oct 23, 1989, 6-7.

<sup>8</sup>On the meaning of זרק, see N. Snaith, "The Sprinkling of Blood," *Expository Times* 82 (1970-71), 23-24.

association of the blood "before the LORD" (before the veil) and the altars indicates the atoning significance of the blood (cf. Lev. 17:11; 9:9). So a substitute or a covering for sin was made before the LORD. There were variations on the above for the sin of an Israelite, a ruler, or the whole congregation (Lev. 4). On the Day of Atonement, the blood was actually sprinkled in the Holy of Holies, on the mercy seat, when atonement was made in this climax of the service of reconciliation (Lev. 16). As is clear from the passages referred to, it was the responsibility of the priests to handle the blood for the reconciliation between God and man.

### *The blood of the covenant*

In conclusion, one additional point should be mentioned. The significance of the shedding and the sprinkling of the blood by the priests in the tabernacle can be seen very clearly in the one-time ceremony of covenant ratification at the foot of Mt. Sinai before there was a tabernacle.

Exodus 24 recounts how the people responded to God's covenant in a positive way. They said, "All that the LORD requires of us we will do" (Ex. 24:3). Then Moses built an altar of twelve pillars according to the number of the tribes of Israel (v. 3). Sacrifices were made. Blood was poured on the altar. There was the atonement for sins. The blood had been shed and applied to the altar. But there's more. The book of the covenant is read in the hearing of all Israel and again they affirm their intention to obey. Then "Moses took the blood and threw (קָרַח) it over the people. And he said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" Blood, probably thinned with water and applied with a branch of hyssop, was scattered over them. Try to imagine yourself below the smoking Sinai, being part of God's people there, witnessing the blood being poured on the altar, affirming twice that you are going to do what God says and then having applied to you that blood as it is thrown over the multitude. Atonement was applied to Israel. Their sins were covered and the people reckoned as clean. In this way, the allegiance that Israel swore by saying "yes" in the presence of God was a blood oath.

It is also this momentous event that lies behind much New Testament understanding of blood. For example, the phrase, "the blood of the covenant" was used by Moses in Exodus 24 of the blood he applied to the people. This phrase, "the blood of the covenant,"

has been fulfilled in Christ's own sacrifice. At the Last Supper, when instituting the Lord's Supper, he said, "This is my blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28; cf. Heb. 9:19-22; 10:29). This is the blood of the covenant. Christ has fulfilled all the sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation (cf. Heb. 9:23-28).

This fulfillment means that we have been sprinkled with the blood of Christ rather than that of animals. Peter can therefore write about being "sprinkled with his [i.e. Christ's] blood." In the context he writes: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood; may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure" (1 Pet. 1:2). "Be sprinkled with his blood." Those words take us back to Exodus 24 and the application of the blood of the covenant. How much further and richer the New Testament church is, compared to those at the foot of the Sinai that day. "If the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls . . . sanctifies for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the Living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14; cf. vv. 19-21). Indeed, Christ's blood is the "sprinkled blood that speaks better than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).