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The Insufficiency of the Levitical Sacrifices

10: 1-4

The insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifices DIG: What was the redeeming factor in the sacrifices during the Dispensation of the Torah? What did the sacrifices show the Israelites that they needed to look forward to? Of what did they serve to remind them? According to Hebrews 10:2, what would have happened if the sacrifices actually removed sin? Who is the most sensitive person in the world of sin? Why was blood such a significant part of the sacrifices in the Torah? Why was it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins?

REFLECT: The sacrifices in the First Covenant did not remove sin; they merely covered their sins. They reminded the Israelites of their sin. What do you do to remind yourself that you have sin that needs to be dealt with? We are not sinners because we sin . . . we sin because we are sinners. What does that mean? Why do you agree or disagree with that statement?

The Jewish people have often thought of themselves as having a love relationship with **the Torah**. Among the greatest honors a synagogue may bestow on one of its own is to designate a person *the Khatan Torah* (Bridegroom of **the Torah**). That title is bestowed with all the pageantry associated with a real wedding. This is done in honor of being called forward to read the opening or closing line of **the Torah** during *Simchat Torah*, the festival of rejoicing over **the Torah**.

It is not uncommon to hear the rabbis speak of **the Torah** as the marriage contract that binds **Adonai**, Isra'el's **Husband**, to **His** Hebrew bride. **God** never breaks **His** contract (because **He** is totally faithful), but what of **sinful** humanity?

The Kabbalah, Isra'el's secret book of mysticism from the Middle Ages, was once read by many. Its mysterious writings are connected with attaining intimate knowledge of **the Almighty**, however its thoughts are obviously human. The title *Kabbalah* means *tradition* - rather than revelation. This mystical book defines a principle that has governed Jewish orthodoxy since the time of Moshe: *kol ha-mosif gorea* (to add is to detract). In reference to the Scriptures, you dare not enlarge on that which **God** has communicated. The command is

found in **Deuteronomy 4:2** and in **Revelation's** final warnings (**Revelation 22:18**). It is an instruction the many, in their zeal to find redemption through **the Torah**, have disregarded.

The author of *the Kabbalah* held that **the Torah** is the binding link between **God** and **His** people, "You should know that the 613 commandments from **the Torah** form a compact with **the Holy One** - blessed be **He** - and with Isra'el (*Kitzur Sh'lu* page 2, column 2). Most importantly, he went on to state that, "No one is perfect (and therefore worthy of being at Abraham's side) unless he has thoroughly observed all of the 613 commandments."

But the question is then raised, "If this this is true, who is he and where is he that has observed all the 613 commandments? For even the lord of the prophets, Moshe or Rabbi - peace be upon him - had not observed them all." The author of *the Kabbalah* was then forced to make an adjustment in his thinking. "Therefore, every Israelite is bound to observe only those of the 613 commandments that are possible for him; and such as he has not observed, in consequences of difficulties arising from unpreventable causes, will be credited to him as if actually performed." But this was like cheating on a test. In this scenario the teacher would say, "Answer all the questions, but any of them you get wrong, I'll assume you had some difficulty in learning the right answer (through no fault of your own), and I'll give you credit as if you actually got the answer right. You don't need to feel **guilty** about it"

Yet reaching a point where people **would no longer have felt guilty for their sins (10:2)** could only be achieved by accepting their word over **God's** Word. We are forever clinging to mankind's lesser standard lest the achievement of perfection remain an elusive dream to us. How we feel about ourselves seems to be more important than **God's** objective, honest evaluation of us. Yet the constant religious activity of priests and populace in first century Judaism, or even today, could draw attention to the reality that even cheating on the test could **make perfect those who draw near to worship (10:1b)**.²⁵⁰



Under the Dispensation of **the Torah** (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Da - The Dispensation of Torah**), the priests were busy all day long, from dawn to sunset, slaughtering **sacrificial** animals. It is estimated that at Passover as many as two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand lambs would be slain within a week. The slaughter would be so massive that **blood** would run out of the Temple ground through specially prepared channels into the Brook Kidron, which seemed to be running with **blood**. But no matter how many **sacrifices** were made, or how often, they were insufficient. They failed in three ways: **they could not bring access to God, they could not remove sin, and they were only external.**²⁵¹

They could not bring access to God: The great cry in the hearts of the righteous of the TaNaKh was to be in the presence of **God (Exodus 33:15; Psalm 16:11)**. But they really had no way of getting there. Even the high priest on the Day of Atonement could not take the people inside the veil, where, symbolically, **YHVH** dwelt. All the old ceremonies and **sacrifices**, though offered continually, year after year, could never **make perfect those who draw near**. They could never bring access to **ADONAI**.

The Torah has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the realities themselves (10:1a). They were **shadows** and could only reflect **the realities of the good things to come**, which were **the realities** of the privileges and blessings of salvation. **The Levitical sacrifices** were only **shadows**. Those rituals and practices were **a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Colossians 2:17)**. **The Torah** was not a true representation and there was no **reality in it** because of its failure to permanently deal with the issue of **sin**. **The reality** was yet **to come.**²⁵²

For this reason the Torah could never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship (10:1b). The words **made perfect** are a translation of the Greek word *teleo*, which means *to bring to a state of completeness*. The idea here is that **the Levitical sacrifices** could not actually save the believer because its work was always short of **perfection.**²⁵³ The repetition of **the Levitical sacrifices** is a theme that is repeated many times in **Hebrews**. However, you can pile **shadow** upon **shadow** upon **shadow**, and you still have no substance. Repetition of a symbol is like multiplying with zero. No matter how many times you repeat the process, the result never increases.

Why then did **Ha'Shem** establish **the** Levitical system with its **shadow** ceremonies, **shadow** rituals and its **shadow sacrifices**? What was the point? Well, even a **shadow** reflects something real. First, it pointed to the real salvation that **was to come**. It was to make

God's people expectant. **Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searching intently and with great care (1 Peter 1:10).** A **shadow** of something - certainly a **God-given shadow** - is infinitely better than no evidence at all.

Second, the purpose of the **shadow sacrifices** was to remind **God's** people that **the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).** **The blood** that flowed from **the bronze altar** (see the commentary on [Exodus Fa - Build an Altar of Acacia Wood Overlaid with Bronze](#)) came from animals that were killed as **sacrifices** for **sin**. The people were constantly being reminded that **the wages of sin is death**, because **death** was going on all day long, all week long, all month long, and all year long - year after year - as animals were being slaughtered.

Third, **ADONAI** gave **His** people **the sacrifices** as a temporary covering for **sin**. When properly offered from a true heart of faith, **the Levitical sacrifices** removed the immediate physical judgment from **YHVH**. To reject **the sacrifices** was to be cut off from **His** people and to suffer some physical judgment, because it revealed an unbelieving, disobedient heart. Those **sacrifices** were physical and so they had some physical effect and value. **They** could not bring a person into the presence of **God**, but they were important to maintaining a demonstration of a person's covenantal relationship with **Him**.²⁵⁴

They could not remove sin: With their **shadow**, **the animal sacrifices** could never remove **sin**. However, removal of **sin** is what mankind needs. **Sin** and **guilt** eat away at us. But **the Levitical sacrifices** could not remove **sin** or **guilt**. **Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins (10:2-3).** Even the covering of **sin** was temporary. It lasted only until the next **sin**. A clean conscience didn't last very long. All **the sacrifices** did was to serve as a constant reminder that their **sin** was not removed.

It is always the believer who is sensitive to **sin**. We have just as much sensitivity to **sin** as unbelievers; it's just that we are delivered from the fear of judgment. We are released from the feelings of **guilt** from **the Levitical sacrifices**. Those taking on **the yoke of the Torah** were never freed from the presence of awareness of **guilt** or from the anxiety and tension that it brings. **Romans Chapters 5 and 6** gives us a good picture of this. It is a wonderful blessing for believers to know **there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)**. It is a wonderful thing to be free from **guilt** and to recognize that our **sins** are continually being forgiven by the grace of **God** through the death of **Messiah**.²⁵⁵

They were only external: It is impossible (Greek: *adunatos*) **for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4)**. Its something like a person whose kidneys are failing and who has to go on a dialysis machine three times a week. The treatments cleanse **the blood** temporarily and keep the patient alive. But the fact that the treatment must be repeated over and over again is a constant reminder how ill he truly is.²⁵⁶ **The blood of bulls and goats**, were “interest only” payments. **It** could only buy time, but not forgiveness. That is why when **Yeshua** died, **He** died for the **sins** of the righteous of the TaNaKh as well as for those sinners after the cross. Animal **blood** was insufficient **to take away sins**. They were only *covered*. *Kafar* is the regular Hebrew word for *covering*. The same word is used when Noah was told to **coat the ark with pitch** (*kafar*) **inside and out** (see the commentary on **Genesis Ce - The Ark is a Type of Christ**). **The blood-sacrifice** of animals did not take away **sins**, it only *covered* **them**. This *covering* symbolized that **sin** was out of **God’s** sight so that **He** could temporarily forgive the **sins** of the righteous of the TaNaKh. However, **sin** could not be permanently removed until the **Messiah** came, suffered, died and ascended to the right hand of **the Father** in the heavenly Tabernacle.²⁵⁷