

SPECIAL STUDY ON THE SPRINKLING OF BLOOD

By S. H. Kellogg

In the case of the burnt-offering and of the peace-offering, in which the idea of expiation, although not absent, yet occupied a secondary place in their ethical intent, it sufficed that the blood of the victim, by whomsoever brought, be applied to the sides of the altar. But in the sin-offering, the blood must not only be sprinkled on the sides of the altar of burnt-offering, but, even in the case of the common people, be applied to the horns of the altar, its most conspicuous and, in a sense, most sacred part. In the case of a sin committed by the whole congregation, even this is not enough; the blood must be brought even into the Holy Place, be applied to the horns of the altar of incense, and be sprinkled seven times before the Lord before the veil which hung immediately before the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, the place of the Shekinah glory. And in the great sin-offering of the high priest once a year for the sins of all the people, yet more was required. The blood was to be taken even within the veil, and be sprinkled on the mercy seat itself over the tables of the broken law.

These several cases, according to the symbolism of these several parts of the tabernacle, differ in that atoning blood is brought ever more and more nearly into the immediate presence of God. The horns of the altar had a sacredness above the sides; the altar of the Holy Place before the veil, a sanctity beyond that of the altar in the outer court; while the Most Holy Place, where stood the ark, and the mercy-seat, was the very place of the most immediate and visible manifestation of Jehovah, who is often described in Holy Scripture, with reference to the ark, the mercy-seat, and the over-hanging cherubim, as the God who "dwelleth between the cherubim."

From this we may easily understand the significance of the different prescriptions as to the blood in the case of different classes. A sin committed by any private individual or by a ruler, was that of one who had access only to the outer court, where

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stood the altar of burnt-offering; for this reason, it is there that the blood must be exhibited, and that on the most sacred and conspicuous spot in that court, the horns of the altar where God meets with the people. But when it was the anointed priest that had sinned, the case was different. In that he had a peculiar position of nearer access to God than others, as appointed of God to minister before Him in the Holy Place, his sin is regarded as having defiled the Holy Place itself; and in that Holy Place must Jehovah therefore see atoning blood ere the priest's position before God can be re-established.

And the same principle required that also in the Holy Place must the blood be presented for the sin of the whole congregation. For Israel in its corporate unity was "a kingdom of priests," a priestly nation; and the priest in the Holy Place represented the nation in that capacity. Thus because of this priestly office of the nation, their collective sin was regarded as defiling the Holy Place in which, through their representatives, the priests, they ideally ministered. Hence, as the law for the priests, so is the law for the nation. For their corporate sin the blood must be applied, as in the case of the priest who represented them, to the horns of the altar in the Holy Place, whence ascended the smoke of the incense which visibly symbolised accepted priestly intercession, and, more than this, before the veil itself; in other words, as near to the very mercy-seat itself as it was permitted to the priest to go; and it must be sprinkled there, not once, nor twice, but seven times, in token of the re-establishment, through the atoning blood, of God's covenant of mercy, of which, throughout the Scripture, the number seven, the number of sabbatic rest and covenant fellowship with God, is the constant symbol.

And it is not far to seek for the spiritual thought which underlies this part of the ritual. For the tabernacle was represented as the earthly dwelling place, in a sense, of God; and just as the defiling of the house of my fellowman may be regarded as an insult to him who dwells in the house, so the sin of the priest and of the priestly people is regarded as, more than that of those outside of this relation, a special affront to the holy majesty of

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Jehovah, criminal just in proportion as the defilement approaches more nearly the innermost shrine of Jehovah's manifestation.

But though Israel is at present suspended from its priestly position and function among the nations of the earth, the Apostle Peter (I Peter 2:5) reminds us that the body of Christian believers now occupies Israel's ancient place, being now on earth the "royal priesthood," the "holy nation." Hence this ritual solemnly reminds us that the sin of a Christian is a far more evil thing than the sin of others; it is as the sin of the priest, and defiles the Holy Place, even though unwittingly committed; and thus, even more imperatively than other sin, demands the exhibition of the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, not now in the Holy Place, but more than that, in the true Holiest of all, where our High Priest is now entered. And thus, in every possible way, with this elaborate ceremonial of sprinkling of blood does the sin-offering emphasize to our own consciences, no less than for ancient Israel, the solemn fact affirmed in the Epistle to the Hebrews (9:22), "Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

Because of this, we do well to meditate much and deeply on this symbolism of the sin-offering, which, more than any other in the law, has to do with the propitiation of our Lord for sin. Especially does this use of the blood, in which the significance of the sin-offering reached its supreme expression, claim our most reverent attention. For the thought is inseparable from the ritual, that blood of the slain victim must be presented, not before the priest, or before the offerer, but before Jehovah. Can anyone mistake the evident significance of this? Does it not luminously hold forth the thought that atonement by sacrifice has to do, not only with man, but with God?

There is cause enough in our day for insisting on this. Many are teaching that the need for the shedding of blood for the remission of sin, lies only in the nature of man; that, so far as concerns God, sin might as well have been pardoned without it; that it is only because man is so hard and rebellious, so stubbornly distrusts the Divine love, that the death of the Holy Victim of Calvary became a necessity. Nothing less than such a

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stupendous exhibition of the love of God could suffice to disarm his enmity to God and win him back to loving trust. Hence the need of the atonement. That all this is true, no one will deny; but it is only half the truth, and the less momentous half,—which indeed is hinted in no offering, and in the sin-offering least of all. Such a conception of the matter as completely fails to account for this part of the symbolic ritual of the bloody sacrifices, as it fails to agree with other teachings of the Scriptures. If the only need for atonement in order to pardon is in the nature of the sinner, then why this constant insistence that the blood of the sacrifice should always be solemnly presented, not before the sinner, but before Jehovah? We see in this fact most unmistakably set forth, the very solemn truth that expiation by blood as a condition of forgiveness of sin is necessary, not merely because man is what he is, but most of all because God is what He is. Let us then not forget that the presentation unto God of an expiation for sin, accomplished by the death of an appointed substitutionary victim, was in Israel made an indispensable condition of the pardon of sin. Is this, as many urge, against the love of God? By no means! Least of all will it so appear, when we remember who appointed the great Sacrifice, and, above all, who came to fulfill this type. God does not love us because atonement has been made, but atonement has been made because the Father loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

God is none the less just, that He is love; and none the less holy, that He is merciful: and in His nature as the Most Just and Holy One, lies this necessity of the shedding of blood in order to the forgiveness of sin, which is impressively symbolized in the unvarying ordinance of the Levitical law, that as a condition of the remission of sin, the blood of the sacrifice must be presented, not before the sinner, but before Jehovah. To this generation of ours, with its so exalted notions of the greatness and dignity of man, and its correspondingly low conceptions of the ineffable greatness and majesty of the Most Holy God, this altar truth may be most distasteful, so greatly does it magnify the evil of sin; but just in that degree it is necessary to the humiliation of

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man's proud self-complacency, that, whether pleasing or not, this truth be faithfully held forth.

Very instructive and helpful to our faith are the allusions to this sprinkling of Blood in the New Testament. Thus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (12:24), believers are reminded that they are come "unto the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better than that of Abel." The meaning is plain. For we are told (Gen. 4:10), that the blood of Abel cried out against Cain from the ground; and that its cry for vengeance was prevailing; for God came down, arraigned the murderer, and visited him with instant judgment. But in these words we are told that the sprinkled blood of the holy Victim of Calvary, sprinkled on the heavenly altar, also has a voice, and a voice which "speaketh better than that of Abel"; better, in that it speaks, not for vengeance, but for pardoning mercy; better, in that it procures the remission even of a penitent murderer's guilt; so that, "being now justified through His blood" we may all "be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). And, if we are truly Christ's, it is our blessed comfort to remember also that we are said (I Peter 1:2) to have been chosen of God unto the sprinkling of this precious blood of Jesus Christ; words which remind us, not only that the blood of a Lamb "without blemish and without spot" has been presented unto God for us, but also that the reason for this distinguishing mercy is found, not in us, but in the free love of God, who chose us in Christ Jesus to this grace.

And as in the burnt-offering, so in the sin-offering, the blood was to be sprinkled by the priest. The teaching is the same in both cases. To present Christ before God, laying the hand of faith upon His head as our sin-offering, this is all we can do or are required to do. With the sprinkling of the blood we have nothing to do. In other words, the effective presentation of the blood before God is not to be secured by some act of our own; it is not something to be procured through some subjective experience, other or in addition to the faith which brings the Victim. As in the type, so in the Antitype, the sprinkling of the atoning blood—that is, its application Godward as a propitiation—is the work of our heavenly Priest. And our part in regard

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to it is simply and only this, that we entrust this work to Him. He will not disappoint us; He is appointed of God to this end, and He will see that it is done.

In a sacrifice in which the sprinkling of the blood occupies such a central and essential place in the symbolism, one would anticipate that this ceremony would never be dispensed with. Very strange it thus appears, at first sight, to find that to this law an exception was made. For it was ordained (v. 11) that a man so poor that "his means suffice not" to bring even two doves or young pigeons, might bring, as a substitute, an offering of fine flour. From this, some have hastened to infer that the shedding of the blood, and therewith the idea of substituted life, was not essential to the idea of reconciliation with God; but with little reason. Most illogical and unreasonable it is to determine a principle, not from the general rule, but from an exception; especially when, as in this case, for the exception a reason can be shown, which is not inconsistent with the rule. For had no such exceptional offering been permitted in the case of the extremely poor man, it would have followed that there would have remained a class of persons in Israel whom God had excluded from the provision of the sin-offering, which He had made the inseparable condition of forgiveness. But two truths were to be set forth in the ritual; the one, atonement by means of a life surrendered in expiation of guilt; the other,—as in a similar way in the burnt-offering,—the sufficiency of God's gracious provision for even the neediest of sinners. Evidently, here was a case in which something must be sacrificed in the symbolism. One of these truths may be perfectly set forth; both cannot be, with equal perfectness; a choice must therefore be made, and is made in this exceptional regulation, so as to hold up clearly, even though at the expense of some distinctness in the other thought of expiation, the unlimited sufficiency of God's provision of forgiving grace.

And yet the prescriptions in this form of the offering were such as to prevent any one from confounding it with the meal-offering, which typified consecrated and accepted service. The oil and the frankincense which belonged to the latter are to be

left out (v. 11); incense, which typifies accepted prayer,—thus reminding us of the unanswered prayer of the Holy Victim when He cried upon the cross, “My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?” and oil, which typifies the Holy Ghost,—reminding us, again, how from the soul of the Son of God was mysteriously withdrawn in that same hour all the conscious presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit, which withdrawal alone could have wrung from His lips that unanswered prayer. And, again, whereas the meal for the meal-offering had no limit fixed as to quantity, in this case the amount is prescribed—“the tenth part of an ephah” (v. 11); an amount which, from the story of the manna, appears to have represented the sustenance of one full day. Thus it was ordained that if, in the nature of the case, this sin-offering could not set forth the sacrifice of life by means of the shedding of blood, it should at least point in the same direction, by requiring that, so to speak, the support of life for one day shall be given up, as forfeited by sin.

All the other parts of the ceremonial are in this ordinance made to take a secondary place, or are omitted altogether. Not all of the offering is burnt upon the altar, but only a part; that part, however, the fat, the choicest; for the same reason as in the peace-offering. There is, indeed, a peculiar variation in the case of the offering of the two young pigeons, in that, of the one, the blood only was used in the sacrifice, while the other was wholly burnt like a burnt-offering. But for this variation the reason is evident enough in the nature of the victims. For in the case of a small creature like a bird, the fat would be so insignificant in quantity, and so difficult to separate with thoroughness from the flesh, that the ordinance must needs be varied, and a second bird be taken for the burning, as a substitute for the separated fat of larger animals. The symbolism is not essentially affected by the variation. What the burning of the fat means in other offerings, that also means the burning of the second bird in this case.