

UNDERSTANDING THE ONE STORY OF SCRIPTURE

Week 19 – JROC – WHY Animal Sacrifices in the Millennial Kingdom?

September 27, 2026

Many believers are asking, “How could anyone believe that animal sacrifices will return after Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin?” We need to understand what Scripture teaches about future worship and what the sacrificial system actually accomplished.

Which temple are we discussing? We need to distinguish between a temple rebuilt in unbelief from the temple associated with the Messiah’s kingdom. II Thess. 2 describes a future event when the “man of lawlessness” enters the temple and declares himself to be god. This will be prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God. There will be a future temple that promotes false worship before there is a temple that promotes true worship.

Isa. 2:2-3 – the nations will stream to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.

Haggai 2:7-9 – promises greater glory for God’s house and peace in that place.

Zech. 6:12-13 - identifies the coming Branch as the One Who will build the temple of the LORD and rule on His throne.

In our study of Scripture, again we need to ask, “How am I reading the Bible?” Should we take Eze. 40-48 literally or symbolically?

Let’s look at three views re: the Millennial sacrifices:

The Symbolic View

According to this view, the sacrifices describe future worship using language familiar to Ezekiel’s audience. However, the offerings themselves will not literally occur. This view appeals to those who see significant theological problems with the sacrificial system continuing post-crucifixion – after Jesus death on the cross.

Ezekiel could have described praise, thanksgiving and worship without providing sacrificial regulations. But, why would the Holy Spirit inspire Ezekiel to affirm a literal temple with symbolic sacrifices? Why should the building be understood literally while the worship within is understood figuratively?

How would the original audience in Ezekiel’s day understand the Prophet Ezekiel? These prophecies were written to people familiar with an actual temple, actual priests, and actual worship in Jerusalem. Ezekiel 40-48 describe the temple, its priesthood, and its sacrifices. Calling the sacrifices symbolic does not resolve the issue.

The Memorial View

This is perhaps the most common view among those who embrace Millennial sacrifices. The memorial view understands the sacrifices as reminders of Jesus’ completed work. This view teaches that OT sacrifices anticipated Jesus; Millennial sacrifices would commemorate Him.

Two issues:

Ezekiel never explicitly identifies remembrance as the purpose of these offerings.

Ezekiel repeatedly states that the offerings make atonement (Eze. 43:20, 26; 45:15, 17, 20). The offerings accomplish something.

The Ceremonial Cleansing View

This view understands the sacrifices as providing ceremonial cleansing for worship in God's presence. The glory of God had returned and He was dwelling in the Millennial Temple! **Read Eze. 43:1-12 & 43:18-27 (consecration of the altar)**

A significant misunderstanding of the sacrificial system is that every OT sacrifice was motivated in some respect by personal sin. Don't we think that way? There were indeed sacrifices where sin was dealt with. But sacrifices were also offered during times of thanksgiving, fellowship, dedication, purification, and consecration – all of which were independent of sin! In fact, the majority of the offerings detailed in the Torah were actually voluntary expressions of worship, gratitude, and communal fellowship that were independent of sin. In the OT we read....

Peace Offering or Fellowship Offering – Lev. 3 and Lev. 7:11-34

Thanksgiving Offering – Lev. 7:12-15...brought to celebrate an unexpected blessing, deliverance from danger, or answered prayer.

Dedication and Consecration

Burnt Offering – Lev. 1 and Lev. 6:8-13 – the animal was completely consumed by fire on the altar; nothing was eaten. It symbolized total surrender, devotion and the dedication of one's life to God (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17 – a sweet aroma to the LORD).

Ordination Offering – Ex. 29 and Lev. 8 – specific sacrifice used exclusively to consecrate Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, setting them apart for holy service. A sin offering was offered as well. The High Priest and Priests, as humans, required personal atonement and cleansing from sin before they could mediate for others and before entering God's holy presence. The priests' own sin and the contamination of the altar had to be addressed.

Ritual Purification (independent of moral sin) – nothing to do with moral wrongdoing or sin. Instead, they marked a transition from a state of ritual uncleanness (often related to death, childbirth, or disease) back into community life.

Purification After Childbirth – Lev. 12. In Lev. 12:2 a sin offering is mentioned for uncleanness caused by bodily fluids – not atonement for moral sin.

Purification After Healing from Skin Diseases – Lev. 14 (leprosy). Lev. 14:19 – *The priest shall offer the sin offering and make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness* - marking transition from uncleanness back to cleanness.

Some balk at the ceremonial cleansing view because Ezekiel mentions the idea of “making atonement” as part of the sacrifices. Most assume making atonement relates to sin and forgiveness. The Hebrew verb translated “make atonement” can describe purification or consecration as well as “atonement” relating to forgiveness. Context determines what is being accomplished.

Eze. 43:20, 26 – atonement is made for the altar. Obviously the altar has not committed a sin. It needs cleansing and consecration for sacred use.

Eze. 45:20 – describes atonement for the temple in connection with human error. Inanimate objects cannot sin; therefore, the atoning sacrifices for the altar and temple cannot be to forgive sins. These are sacrifices of worship and consecration.

Eze. 45:15, 17 – referencing people could relate to the forgiveness of sins. However, the surrounding emphasis on purification supports an understanding that these offerings provide ceremonial cleansing.

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Eze. 36:25-27; 37:23 – Ezekiel has already promised Israel cleansing and restoration under the New Covenant! Yet, the Priests must still teach the distinction between the holy and the common, and between the clean and the unclean (Eze. 44:23).

During the Millennial Kingdom, righteousness and holiness will prevail; however those with earthly bodies will have a sin nature.

NOTE: Matt. 25:31-46 – three groups of people: 1) goats: non-believers from “all the nations”; 2) sheep: believers from “all the nations”; 3) “My brethren” – the believing Jewish remnant. The sheep and “My brethren” enter the Kingdom. Rev. 20:7-10 – Satan will be loosed and deceive and gather to do battle whose # is as the sand of the sea shore!!!!

To be continued....

